



# EX NIHILO

} SPRING 2011 {

*The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of The University of Texas at Austin*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FIRST and foremost, we would like to thank the UT Philosophy Department for their tremendous support. Without their help, this journal would not have been possible. In particular, we would like to thank Dr. Al Martinich for his guidance throughout the entire process, and Skye Son who facilitated almost every aspect of our work. We also want to thank the talented and dedicated students who took the time to write and submit these papers. We believe that each selection is the fruit of exemplary commitment to undergraduate scholarship. One of the best experiences of being involved in this project has been to see the real love for philosophy that exists within undergraduate programs across the country. Finally, we want to thank the entire staff of Ex Nihilo for the many hours they spent reading papers, offering suggestions, and putting up with two stressed out co-editors-in-chief. It has been a pleasure to work with all of you.

*Pavel Nitchovski*  
& *Justin Olaquer*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ex Nihilo Staff		p. <i>iii</i>
The Purification of Not-Being: Gorgias' On Not-Being & the Philosophical Context of Plato's Sophist	By Mathew Lefavor <i>Belmont University</i>	p. 1
Heidegger, Avatar, & the Gulf of Mexico Oil Leak	By Omar Quinonez <i>The University of Colorado</i>	p. 13
Society and Justice for Victims of Sexual Enslavement: A Comparative Look at the <i>Ianfu</i> of the Japanese Imperial Army	By Catherine Wittkower <i>The University of Texas at Austin</i>	p. 29
Powerism	By Daniel Boyd <i>The University of Texas at Austin</i>	p. 44
Greatest Difficulty Argument in Plato's Parmenides 133c-134c	By John Lindsay <i>Stanford University</i>	p. 51

# EX NIHILO STAFF

Pavel Nitchovski & Justin Olaguer, Co-Editors-In-Chief

Lauren Goldman, Data Manager

Susannah Duerr, Copy Editor

William Ott, Head Reader

Cornelio Morales, Reader



## The Purification of Not-Being: Gorgias' On Not-Being and the Philosophical Context of Plato's Sophist

Matthew Lefavor

### Abstract:

In this paper, I analyze the connections between Plato's *Sophist* and Gorgias' *On Not-Being or On Nature*. I argue that the *Sophist* is best construed as a reaction to Gorgias' oration, based on the dramatic context of the dialogue, hints in other dialogues, and the two works' parallel argumentative concerns and structures. I further argue that this interpretation undermines some traditional claims about the *Sophist*, including the thesis that the *Sophist* marks a major revision or even abandonment of Plato's earlier views. I then offer my own view that the dialogue is an exercise in intellectual purification, supporting this view with the dramatic elements of the *Sophist*. This view coheres well with my claim that Plato wrote the dialogue as a refutation of Gorgias and further supports my claims about developmental interpretations of the *Sophist*.<sup>1</sup>

Like many other Platonic dialogues, the *Sophist* displays a manifest concern for the question of what it means to be a philosopher. The *Sophist* is unique, however, in containing Plato's longest sustained inquiry into what the philosopher is *not*—namely, a sophist. Plato's portrayal of sophistry is, of course, more than a mere literary device for making the portrait of the philosopher clearer. Plato's discussion of sophistry throughout the dialogues is intimately connected with the historical phenomenon of sophistry and its intellectual forefathers—particularly Gorgias. In fact, Plato polemically targets Gorgias and his teachings in twelve different dialogues.<sup>2</sup> Given this conspicuous interest in Gorgias' teachings, it is reasonable to assume that Plato read Gorgias' widely known attack on Parmenidean philosophy, *On Not-Being or On Nature*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in interpreting the *Sophist*, which deals extensively with Parmenides' arguments, it would be prudent to investigate the connections between the philosophical content of the dialogue and Gorgias' oration. In the following paper, I argue that one of Plato's chief concerns in the *Sophist* is the refutation of the arguments found in Gorgias' *On Not-Being*. I will first cite evidence in favor of this view, drawing from other dialogues as well as the dramatic elements in the *Sophist* itself. I will then show how the specific arguments in *On Not-Being* are both appropriated and addressed in the *Sophist*. Afterwards, I will show how my view informs

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Steven Humphrey Student Philosophy Colloquium at University of Louisville on November 12, 2010, under the title "Plato *contra* Gorgias: Gorgias' *On Not-Being* and the Philosophical Context of the *Sophist*." Another early draft was presented under its current title at the SUNY Oneonta 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, which occurred April 28-30, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of these occurrences, see Scott Consigny, *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 37, and especially 217n. 5. Note that not all of these occurrences explicitly mention Gorgias by name.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the popularity of Gorgias' tract, see Steve Hays, "On the Skeptical Influence of Gorgias's *On Non-Being*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 327-337 (especially pp. 329-331 and 333-335). Hays points to Isocrates' casual (but highly critical) allusions to *On Not-Being* and Aristophanes' parody of *On Not-Being* in his *Thesmophoriazuse* (discussed below) as evidence that it could function as a paradigmatic example of philosophical and skeptical excesses. Hays argues that many Athenians were familiar with even the details of Gorgias' arguments, to the point that "it seems virtually certain that Plato encountered people... who challenged his views with skeptical arguments learned from [*On Not-Being*]" (ibid., 335).

broader interpretive debates about the *Sophist* (specifically regarding Plato's relationship to Parmenides and the thesis that Plato's thought developed over time), and offer my own comprehensive interpretation of the dialogue as an exercise in intellectual purification.

Unfortunately, the original text of Gorgias' *On Not-Being* is no longer extant, and we are left with only a handful of paraphrases.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the work remains somewhat obscure to modern readers, so it may be helpful to review its central claims here, before addressing the details of its arguments later. *On Not-Being* is a harsh attack against Parmenides, employing Parmenides' style of argumentation to put forward three theses: first, there is nothing that *is* (neither that-which-is nor that-which-is-not);<sup>5</sup> second, that even if there were something-that-is, one could not have knowledge or true beliefs about it; and third, that even if that-which-is could be known, it could not be communicated, making true speech impossible.<sup>6</sup>

The *Sophist* is more complex—in part due to its literary form as a dialogue, rather than a straightforward treatise—and thus requires a longer exposition. Set the day after the *Theaetetus* and the *Euthyphro*, it recounts a conversation between Theaetetus, a gifted youth, and the unnamed Visitor from Elea, the Greek colony in southern Italy where Parmenides lived and taught. Theodorus the geometer and Socrates make a brief appearance in the dialogue's introduction as well. The interlocutors' original aim is to give an account of sophistry, and after several preliminary definitions, they eventually put forward that the sophist is a maker of false verbal appearances. Unfortunately, if the sophist speaks falsehood, then he says that-which-is-not, a view that commits them to “the rash assumption that that-which-is-not *is*” in some way.<sup>7</sup> But according to Parmenides, this is impossible; that-which-is-not cannot *be*, by definition. To move past this confusion, they examine the accounts of “everyone who's ever said anything at all about being,”<sup>8</sup> which culminates in an account of the principle of “the different.” This allows them to conceive of that-which-is-not as that-which-is-*different*, which in turn allows them to give an account of false belief and false speech.

A detailed discussion of the argument of these works and the relationships between them will have to wait until it has been established that the two works are actually related. But even now it should be clear that the content of Gorgias' *On Not-Being* almost perfectly parallels the philosophical content of the *Sophist*. Gorgias' first thesis is that neither that-which-is-not nor that-which-is *are*, while Plato is concerned with showing a way in which *both* that-which-is and that-which-is-not *are*. Similarly, Gorgias' second and third theses, that true belief and true speech are impossible, correspond to the Visitor's treatment of false belief and false speech. After all, the possibility of false belief and speech rests on the possibility of true belief and speech—otherwise, the notion of “falsity” fails to be a meaningful distinction. Furthermore, both Plato and Gorgias are working within an account of being inherited from Parmenides, and both

---

<sup>4</sup> The most cited paraphrase appears in Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Mathematicians*, but another can be found in *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, an anonymous work once attributed to Aristotle.

<sup>5</sup> The Greek constructions used to talk about being are particularly awkward when rendered in English. In order to lessen my dependence on any particular interpretation of the verb “to be,” I have elected to use the most literal possible translation of the concept at the unavoidable expense of grammatical clarity. When possible, I have used italics and hyphenation to aid the reader. As regards the possible interpretations of “to be” (e.g., whether it functions existentially or predicatively), see the discussion of Charles H. Kahn's work, found below.

<sup>6</sup> For the ancient Greeks, speaking the truth meant saying that-which-is. If that-which-is cannot be spoken, then there is nothing to account for the truth or falsehood of speech. For a more extensive discussion, see n. 28, below.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Nicholas White (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 237a (emphasis and hyphenation mine).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 251c.

appropriate and modify his specific arguments. Not only are the two works connected by content, however, but several contextual features of the *Sophist* also testify to such a connection.

Aside from their parallel philosophical content, the most obvious evidence in favor of a connection between the *Sophist* and *On Not-Being* is the *Sophist*'s framing narrative of "hunting" for the proper definition of the sophist. It seems clear that Plato's main goal in the *Sophist* is the technical discussion of being and not-being for which the dialogue is famous. After all, if Plato were primarily interested in defining the sophist, the Visitor need never have mentioned the problem that false saying and believing involves "the rash assumption that that-which-is-not *is*." Even so, this does not give us reason to gloss over the introductory sections and regard them, as Kenneth Sayre does, as a "feigning pursuit of the essential sophist."<sup>9</sup> Even Nicholas White's characterization of the section as "a way of presenting the general intellectual motivation for the more technical investigation of 'that-which-is-not'" seems unsatisfying.<sup>10</sup> It seems strange that over one-third of the dialogue should be devoted to mere stage-setting. The Visitor is an Eleatic philosopher, after all, so he presumably studied under Parmenides or his immediate successors. If Plato wished to discuss the Parmenidean problems of not-being, the Visitor's arrival would have provided a more than adequate narrative occasion for doing so without ever mentioning sophistry. Charity compels us to believe that Plato—who, as one of the most eminent literary minds of his time, is otherwise so closely attentive to detail—has more than an arbitrary reason for framing the entire narrative structure of the dialogue the way that he does. For Plato, the task of defining the sophist must have been more than an accidental occasion for the discussion of the issues at hand. Plato must have seen some necessary connection between the Parmenidean doctrines he discusses and the cultural phenomenon of sophistry.

This connection can be found in Gorgias' *On Not-Being*. Historically, Gorgias was perhaps the best-known sophist to teach in classical Athens. A later sophist would call him the "father... [of] the art of the sophists,"<sup>11</sup> and his rhetorical style was so influential and recognizable that one historian coined the verb "to Gorgianize" to describe those who imitated him.<sup>12</sup> Gorgias commanded fees that later sophists—and modern educators, for that matter—could only dream about.<sup>13</sup> Gorgias was *the* paradigmatic sophist—unparalleled in terms of oratorical skill, wildly popular, and particularly skilled at convincing the Athenians of the value of his teachings. Any discussion of sophistry in general would certainly bring to mind the most eminent individual sophist.

We also find Plato explicitly acknowledging the threat of Gorgias' arguments in an earlier dialogue, the *Parmenides*.<sup>14</sup> A fictional Parmenides warns Socrates of all three of Gorgias' theses (though the third is slightly mitigated): "Whoever hears about [the Forms] is doubtful and objects that *they do not exist*, and even if they do, *they must by strict necessity be unknowable* to human nature... [And] *only a prodigy... [will] be able to teach someone else* who

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Sayre, "Falsehood, Forms and Participation in the *Sophist*," *Noûs* 4 (1970): 81.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas White, introduction to Plato, *Soph.*, xii, hyphenation mine.

<sup>11</sup> Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, I.9.1 (DK82A1), in George Kennedy, trans., "Gorgias," in Rosamond Kent Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972): 30-31.

<sup>12</sup> "Agathon, too, the tragic poet, whom Comedy regards as wise and eloquent, often Gorgianizes in his iambic verse." *Ibid.*, I.9.3.

<sup>13</sup> An anonymous writer recorded his lesson fee as 100 *minae*. See *Suidas* (DK82A1), in Kennedy, "Gorgias," 32. Some calculations indicate that this was as high as \$500,000, per student, per course. See Emily R. Wilson, *The Death of Socrates* (London: Profile, 2007), 43.

<sup>14</sup> I owe the following observation to Hays, "On the Skeptical Influence of Gorgias' *On Non-Being*," 335.

has sifted all these difficulties thoroughly and critically for himself.”<sup>15</sup>

Plato does not address these specific arguments in the *Parmenides*, but there is good reason to believe that the remark looks ahead toward the *Sophist* (which is usually held to have been written some time after the *Parmenides*). Plato, especially in his later works, often alludes to future dialogues. He does this even in the *Sophist* itself, when he alludes to the argument of Book X of the *Laws* (Plato’s last dialogue) concerning the role of reason in nature.<sup>16</sup> The most compelling evidence, however, is the fact that the *Sophist* looks back toward the *Parmenides*. Plato explicitly connects the dialogue to the *Parmenides* through Socrates’ recalling of his earlier conversation with that dialogue’s namesake.<sup>17</sup> This connection is further reinforced by a parallel dialogical structure of a Parmenides character conversing with a young Socrates character. The Visitor hails from Elea, where Parmenides founded his school, and Theaetetus looks much like Socrates.<sup>18</sup> If this were not enough, there is even a young boy also named Socrates standing nearby,<sup>19</sup> waiting to step in and replace Theaetetus if he becomes tired. Plato evidently regarded the *Sophist* as a continuation of the discussion of concerns raised in the *Parmenides*. All the preceding evidence—the correspondence of the *Sophist*’s arguments with Gorgias’ arguments, the *Sophist*’s framing narrative of defining sophistry in connection with Gorgias’ historical role as the paradigmatic sophist, and the close relationship between the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* (a dialogue that explicitly calls attention to Gorgias’ theses)—amounts to a convincing case that one of Plato’s main concerns in composing the *Sophist* was to address Gorgias’ arguments.

We pause here to address one obvious objection to my view: the *Sophist* never mentions Gorgias by name. Plato targets Gorgias in many other places, often by name, even going so far as to depict him as the eponymous major character of the *Gorgias*. In the *Sophist* itself, Plato even mentions an obscure work by Protagoras at 232d. If the *Sophist* really is directed against Gorgias, then it seems strange that Plato should mention an obscure text tangentially related to the issue at hand and not his actual target.

Then again, it would have been to Plato’s advantage *not* to frame the dialogue as a straightforward refutation of a single text—a task much more suited to a scholarly exercise than an organic philosophical dialogue in which problems arise naturally. Furthermore, it seems that Plato saw that the roots of the problem of not-being were in some sense historical—otherwise he need not have discussed the opinions of “everyone who’s ever said anything at all about being.” After all, the author of *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, states that Gorgias merely “collects the statements of others” in order to support his argument.<sup>20</sup> The problem was bigger than Gorgias; it involved the entire Greek philosophical tradition, even if Gorgias was in this case its most conspicuous representative. Not mentioning Gorgias would give Plato’s argument more generality.

Furthermore, Plato did not *have* to mention Gorgias’ work for his readers to recognize the connection. He would not have been the only author to criticize *On Not-Being* in a published

---

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, 135a-b, trans. Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan, in John Cooper, ed., *The Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): 359-397 (emphasis mine).

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 265c.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 217c.

<sup>18</sup> “[Theaetetus] is not beautiful at all, but rather like [Socrates], snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out.” Plato, *Theaetetus*, 143e, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, in John Cooper, ed., *The Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): 157-234.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 218b.

<sup>20</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle, *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, 979a14, trans. T. Loveday and E. S. Forster, in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984): 1539-1351.

work without mentioning its author by name. Aristophanes, for example, parodies Gorgias' third thesis in the opening scene his *Thesmophoriazuse*,<sup>21</sup> without ever mentioning Gorgias' name (the argument is placed in the mouth of Euripides instead). Opening a play with a joke about the details of a sophistic argument would hardly make sense if most of the audience were unfamiliar with the argument (and thus unable to understand the joke). Plato's readers, who were undoubtedly more educated than the average theatergoer, would certainly understand that Gorgias' and Plato's works were related. At any rate, the fact that Plato does not explicitly mention Gorgias in the *Sophist* certainly does not mean that Plato did not have Gorgias in mind as a primary polemical target.

Having established the connection between *On Not-Being* and the *Sophist*, we turn now to an interpretive problem that affects both works, before examining the specific arguments of the texts themselves. The interpretation of both works, in addition to Parmenides' poem, hinges on the meaning of the Greek word *einai*, "to be." Traditionally, the word has been interpreted in the "existential" sense, so that the phrase "that-which-is" is assumed to mean "that-which-exists." Some translators, for example, renders Gorgias' first thesis as "nothing exists."<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, Charles H. Kahn argues that the ancient Greek thinkers most likely did not share our concept of existence,<sup>23</sup> and instead "the most fundamental value of *einai* when used alone (without predicates) is not 'to exist' but 'to be so,' 'to be the case,' or 'to be true.'"<sup>24</sup> Kahn calls this sense the "veridical" usage of "to be."<sup>25</sup>

On this reading, "that-which-is" denotes *truth*, rather than those entities that happen to exist. But we must be careful not to read our modern notion of truth as a property of a proposition into ancient texts. This is best illustrated by an example from Greek epistemology. Statements of propositional knowledge—e.g., "I know that Socrates is wise"—are rendered in Classical Greek as knowledge of an object—e.g., "I know the wise Socrates"—because the Greek language treats a proposition not as logical unit but as a thing having a property.<sup>26</sup> This grammatical feature will have significant consequences for my interpretation of these two texts.

Assuming Kahn is right,<sup>27</sup> we must read Gorgias' claims as follows: nothing is true, truth is unknowable, and truth is unspeakable. In addition to making Gorgias' claims slightly more

<sup>21</sup> Again, I owe this observation to Steven Hays, who discusses the *Thesmophoriazuse* in "On the Skeptical Influence of Gorgias' *On Non-Being*," 333-36.

<sup>22</sup> See Kennedy's translation of the Sextus paraphrase in "Gorgias," 42-46. Rendered this way, Gorgias' position seems rather extreme, if not patently absurd. Because of this, many commentators have viewed *On Not-Being* not as a serious philosophical work but as a parody of the Eleatic mode of philosophizing—a shallow parody that merely highlights Gorgias' misunderstanding of the issues at hand—rendering Gorgias' position unfit for treatment in a serious philosophical setting such as the *Sophist*. This simply cannot be the case, however, if only for the fact that the work was taken seriously by the author of *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, as well as such renowned thinkers as Isocrates and Sextus Empiricus (and, if I am right, Plato). See Consigny, *Gorgias*, 36-37.

<sup>23</sup> See Charles H. Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being," *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966): 245-65, especially 248-250.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy Chappell, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, §4, accessed March 10, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-theaetetus/>.

<sup>27</sup> Because there is room for debate, I wish to make clear that I am not resting my case solely on the plausibility of Kahn's analysis. For it is clear that *On Not-Being* and the *Sophist* are both related to Parmenides' poem, so it is highly likely that, no matter what these three thinkers mean by "being," they all mean the same thing. Edward Schiappa agrees: "The very ambiguity of Parmenides' subjectless *esti* required the hearers of *On Not-Being* or *On Nature* to supply parallel semantic content to make sense of his similarly subjectless *ouk esti*." Edward Schiappa, "Interpreting Gorgias' 'Being' in *On Not-Being* or *On Nature*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30 (1997): 27.

palatable, this reading of “that-which-is” also accords well with the *Sophist*. It makes clear the logical connection between “false saying or believing” and “the rash assumption that that-which-is-not *is*.” False saying literally means “saying that-which-is-not-true,”<sup>28</sup> which means that that-which-is-not must *be* in order for it to be said. It also makes the *Sophist*’s connection to Gorgias’ first thesis more explicit. Gorgias’ claim that that-which-is-not cannot *be* is not a claim that that-which-does-not-exist does not exist (a claim that would be almost too obvious to state), but rather that there is no such thing as falsehood. To say that there is falsehood (e.g., that-which-is-not) implies that that-which-is-not *is* in some way, which on the surface seems to be a contradiction. If this really is a contradiction, then there is no falsehood, and consequently a sophist cannot be defined as a maker of false appearances.

I will now call attention to the specific arguments of Gorgias’ text<sup>29</sup> and how these arguments are addressed in the *Sophist*. Gorgias first claims that that-which-is-not cannot be, for insofar as that-which-is-not *is*, we claim that it both *is* and *is not* at the same time. It is therefore an absurdity to claim that-which-is-not can *be* in any way whatsoever. Again, according to the reading of “that-which-is” suggested above, this roughly means that one cannot state that “*p* is false” (i.e., “*p* is not”) without in turn stating that “it is true of *p* that it is false” (recalling that propositions are being conceptualized as things, and truth and falsity as properties of those things), and thus *pure* falsehood in all respects could never subsist.

Plato adapts this kind of argument in 238e-239a, when the Visitor points out that “in trying to attach *being* to [that-which-is-not]—it *is* unutterable, inexpressible, etc.—[I was] saying things that are the contrary of what I’d said before.” Fundamentally, the Visitor does not disagree with Gorgias on this point, and agrees that Gorgias’ conclusions follow so long as falsehood is construed as “that-which-is-in-no-way-true.” Yet the Visitor later points out that this kind of thinking is an equivocation on the term “not-being”; “that-which-is-not” usually stands in for “that-which-is-different” rather than that which has absolutely no share in being. Since that-which-is-different can still *be* without contradiction (unlike that-which-is-not, considered literally), this means he can provide a substantive account of the real existence of falsehood as a *positive* property (e.g., something-that-*is*), which is not vulnerable to Gorgias’ argument.

Gorgias’ next target is that-which-is, against which he has two arguments. The first runs as follows: that-which-is must be either eternal or generated. It cannot be generated, for then it must have come into being either from that-which-is—in which case, that-which-is was already present and not generated—or from that-which-is-not—which, since it *is not*, it could not have brought something else into being. Yet it cannot be eternal, either, for if it were eternal it would be unlimited, and if it were unlimited it could not be located anywhere,<sup>30</sup> for there is nothing

---

<sup>28</sup> Again, I draw attention to the fact that the Greeks conceived of truth and falsehood as properties of *things*, not propositions. For example, towards the end of the *Sophist* (263b) the Visitor claims that false speech “says those that are not, but that they are.” A speaker does not state a state of affairs, but a “that-which-is,” a *thing*. False speech happens to say a thing that has the property of not-being, or falsehood. Insofar as it has the property of not-being, it *is* in some way, and thus it is not wholly and in every respect a pure not-being or falsehood.

<sup>29</sup> All of these arguments, unless otherwise noted, can be found in Sextus Empiricus’ paraphrase in Patricia Curd, ed. and Richard D. McKirahan, Jr., trans., *A Presocratic Reader* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996): 99-102.

<sup>30</sup> This argument may seem strange, but Kahn points out that the verb “to be” in almost all languages carries “locative” connotations. In English, for example, one states that something exists with the construction “*there is*.” This was especially true in ancient Greek. Kahn points out an example from Plato himself from the *Timaeus*, where Plato relates a common Greek intuition about being: “We look at it as in a dream when we say that everything that exists must of necessity be somewhere, in some place and occupying some space, and that that which doesn’t exist somewhere, whether on earth or in heaven, doesn’t exist at all.” Plato, *Timaeus*, 52b, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in John Cooper, ed., *The Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 1224-1292. See

outside of the unlimited to serve as the container and limit of the unlimited.<sup>31</sup> If that-which-is is contained within itself, it then becomes not one thing, but two: space, and the body contained within space. But it cannot be both; thus that-which-is cannot be at all.<sup>32</sup>

His second argument proceeds from the premise that if that-which-is *is*, then it is either a one or a many. If that-which-is is a one, then it is a quantity, a continuum, a magnitude, or a body.<sup>33</sup> All of these things are divisible into parts, and these parts are different from the one of which they are a part. Since that-which-is is the original one, the parts cannot be that-which-is, and thus cannot *be*. But if the parts *are* not, then the one of which they are a part cannot *be*. Therefore, that-which-is is not a one. The possibility of being a many, however, rests on the possibility of there being multiple ones, meaning that-which-is cannot be a many, either. Therefore, that-which-is cannot *be* at all.

Plato does not explicitly address the first argument, but his rebuttal of the second also applies to the first. Interestingly enough, Plato seems to *employ* this argument as a criticism of Parmenides in 244e-245d of the *Sophist*, claiming that the Parmenidean One must have a middle and extremities, and is thus composed of parts. Therefore, being must belong to the parts, and not to the whole. We should be suspicious of the arguments the Visitor makes at this stage in the *Sophist*, however, because many of them (including this one) rest on premises that he later rejects. Most importantly, this argument (and hence Gorgias' argument) rests on the premise that "it is absurd for someone to agree that there are two names when he maintains that there is only one thing."<sup>34</sup> This premise is rejected at 251a,<sup>35</sup> where Plato begins his account of how principles such as rest, change, being, sameness, and difference mix.

Gorgias' argument rests on the equivocation of the meaning and referent of a name,<sup>36</sup>

---

also Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be,'" 257-259.

<sup>31</sup> Gorgias reasons that the eternal is unlimited because it has no beginning, and is thus unlimited *temporally*. One might object that the "locative" aspect of being (see n. 30, above) and Gorgias' talk of "being contained" seem to be spatial constructions. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the locative aspect of being could still refer to a conceptual, non-literal place. Kahn cites the famous example of Plato's "intelligible world" of the Forms, which was "quite literally as an intelligible region or place... conceived by analogy with the region known to sense-experience." See Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be,'" 258f. I believe Gorgias' application of "being contained" to something temporal follows a similar line of thinking.

<sup>32</sup> The argument that that-which-is must *be* somewhere suggests that Gorgias is here employing "to be" in an existential, rather than a veridical sense. Even Kahn himself notes that the locative function (see n. 30, above) of "to be" is more closely associated with existential function of "to be" than the predicative, to the extent that he speaks of a "existential-locative sense" of "to be." See *ibid.*, 257. I do not think there is any reason Gorgias could not be employing both senses of the word. If, in this case, Gorgias is using the existential sense of "to be," I think he is using it alongside the veridical sense. The first "is" in "that-which-is *is*" is veridical, while the second "is" may be existential-locative. It may be objected that if Gorgias' first "is" is veridical, then "that-which-is" denotes truth, and we are faced with the odd conclusion that truth is located somewhere. But, as pointed out above (n. 31), the locative aspect of "to be" need not indicate a location in physical space.

<sup>33</sup> This is admittedly puzzling passage (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII.73), and I am unsure why these four possibilities logically follow from that-which-is being a one. Perhaps Gorgias is claiming that-which-is must be one of the four candidates, regardless of whether that-which-is is a one or a many. Since all of the four are divisible, none are a one. Therefore, that-which-is is not a one, and, conversely, a one cannot *be*.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 244c.

<sup>35</sup> The Visitor makes a sarcastic remark at 251c about the kinds of people who would accept this premise: "Sometimes they're elderly people who are amazed at this kind of thing, because their understanding is so poor and they think they've discovered something prodigiously wise." It would be impossible to confirm the following suspicion, but the remark could be interpreted as a jab at Gorgias, given that his arguments rested on such a premise and that Gorgias was well-known for being a centenarian—and hence quite elderly.

<sup>36</sup> Keep in mind that, for Plato, predicates are a kind of name: "Surely we're speaking of a man even when

which leads him to believe the two are interchangeable. On this understanding, if that-which-is is called a “whole,” then the parts cannot be a “that-which-is,” for “whole” and “that-which-is” would be interchangeable, whereas “whole” and “part” are not. Similarly, that-which-is cannot be both container and contained, for the two concepts are not interchangeable. Indeed, Gorgias’ assumption has consequences more dire than he even realized. Insofar as a name is something that *is*, and that-which-is is a one, then a name could only name itself.<sup>37</sup> If there were something for a name to name, then that-which-is would be more than one.

All these conclusions follow from the faulty premise that a thing cannot have two names without those names meaning the same thing. This is a premise that Plato successfully demolishes through his account of the weaving together of Forms, demonstrating how one thing can have several names and properties. That-which-is can include both the one and the parts without contradiction. This allows him to refute Gorgias’ contention that that-which-is cannot *be*.

Gorgias’ next claim—that if that-which-is *is*, it cannot be known—also rests on this premise, and is thus easily addressed by Plato. Gorgias argues that that-which-is cannot be considered or grasped in the mind, because the mind is capable of grasping many things that *are* not, such as flying men and undersea chariot races. “For opposites have opposite attributes,” Gorgias argues, so “if ‘being thought of’ is an attribute of what-is, ‘not being thought of’ will assuredly be an attribute of what-is-not,” and vice-versa.<sup>38</sup> It should be clear that Plato need only respond that being and being-known need not mean the same thing, and that negation need not signify an absolute contrary in all possible respects.<sup>39</sup> Since “being considered in the mind” and “not being considered in the mind” are not contraries, instead merely being different, then Gorgias’ argument that “opposites are attributes of opposites” does not apply. It is, therefore, possible to consider in the mind a sentence like “Theaetetus flies”<sup>40</sup> without, to use Gorgias’ expression, “it [being] the case that forthwith a person is flying.”<sup>41</sup>

Gorgias’ final claim—that even if that-which-is could be considered in the mind, it could not be communicated—is more subtle. Gorgias claims that, just as visible objects are not audible and audible objects are not visible, linguistic objects (*logoi*) are not things-that-are in the external world. He further observes that from an encounter with a quality in the external world, “there arises in us the *logos* which is expressed with reference to this quality.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, it is not speech that reveals anything about the external world; rather, “the external comes to be communicative of the *logos*” and grounds the meaning of speech.<sup>43</sup> To comprehend the meaning of speech about that-which-is presupposes prior revelation of that-which-is, and therefore that-which-is cannot be communicated.

---

we name him several things, that is, when we apply colors to him and shapes, sizes, defects, and virtues.” *Ibid.*, 251a.

<sup>37</sup> Allan Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence: A Study of Plato’s Metaphysics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 152-153.

<sup>38</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII.80.

<sup>39</sup> “So we won’t agree with somebody who says that negation signifies a contrary. We’ll only admit this much: when ‘not’ and ‘non-’ are prefixed to names that follow them, they indicate something *other* than the names.” Plato, *Soph.* 257c.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 263a. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 158b. Michael Bakaoukas points out that the fact Plato uses a flying man as an example is a nod to *On-Not Being*, which also employs a flying man as an example of a non-existent object. See Michael Bakoukas, “Gorgias the Sophist on Not-Being: A Wittgensteinian Interpretation,” *Sorites* 13 (2001): 82, accessed December 6, 2010, [http://www.sorites.org/Issue\\_13/sorites13.pdf](http://www.sorites.org/Issue_13/sorites13.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII.79.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.79. The quality in question is flavor, but the thought clearly extends to the general case.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, VII 85.

This is particularly dangerous for Plato, since the Visitor's claim that thought is nothing but silent speech "inside the soul in conversation with itself"<sup>44</sup> links Plato's account of belief and knowledge (i.e., "being thought of") to the possibility of true and false speech. Yet Plato's account seems to address Gorgias' position elegantly. Gorgias' account *does* seem to make sense for individual linguistic objects. Words by themselves are empty, revealing nothing; the possibility of a word having any significance presupposes that the hearer is already acquainted with the concept being signified. The word "*logos*" is ambiguous, however, meaning both "speech" and "word." The Visitor points out this ambiguity, and claims that speech is not just a string of individual words (e.g., "walks runs sleeps"), but the weaving together of verbs and names.<sup>45</sup> This weaving together makes speech meaningful, which allows speech to be *about* something and to do more than just name objects. The weaving together of Forms allows speech to reveal something-that-is. The truth or falsity of speech, then, can be judged according to whether that which is revealed by speech is different from that-which-is. With that, Plato addresses Gorgias' final argument and secures his account of that-which-is, keeping his metaphysics safe from the skeptical arguments of the sophist.

I will now turn to the question of how the connection between the *Sophist* and *On Not-Being* relates to broader interpretive questions about the dialogue. First, the connection sheds light on the relationship between Plato and Parmenides. In isolation, it may seem that Plato aims to subject Parmenides to radical critique, especially given the argument of 244e-245d. Yet we have just seen that this argument is not Plato's own, but it is adapted from Gorgias. Plato adapts this argument not as a criticism of Parmenides, but of Gorgias, since he shows that the argument rests on faulty premises. Seen this way, the Visitor is actually defending Parmenides, and the theory of being that the Visitor offers is a development of Parmenides' doctrine, meant to *preserve* rather than *replace* the old view. Plato's theory is still a significant modification of Parmenides' doctrine, of course, but his defense of Parmenides shows that he thought of the Eleatic sage as more of an ally than a competitor.

Second, the *Sophist's* relationship to *On Not-Being* partially undermines the claim that the *Sophist* represents a marked development in Plato's metaphysics. As an example, Kenneth Sayre argues that in "earlier" dialogues Plato makes use of the notion that the Forms and the objects that instantiate them "resemble" one another, but that the *Sophist* lacks such language. Sayre argues that this is evidence of Plato's revising his account in order to escape what he sees as the "devastating absurdities" of the earlier view.<sup>46</sup> We have just seen, however, that the central steps of Plato's argument—the weaving together of Forms in language, the distinction between the different and the not-being, and the account of how one thing can have many names—address concerns raised by Gorgias. If Plato had a polemical target, then, the fact that Plato chooses not to mention a particular element of an earlier statement of his theory does not mean that he has abandoned that element of the theory, but rather that it was not necessary to mention it in order to defeat his opponent. Keep in mind that I am not claiming this as *positive* evidence for the claim that Plato *did not* revise his positions in the *Sophist*. If Plato's only goal were to refute Gorgias, then it does not seem that the criticisms of the "friends of the Forms" in the gigantomachy—including the admission that the metaphysically ultimate principle undergoes change—are necessary, so it is of course plausible that Plato included these criticisms as actual misgivings about his own theory. I am only urging *caution* to those who would claim that the

---

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 263e.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 262d.

<sup>46</sup> Sayre, "Falsehood, Forms, and Participation," 87.

*Sophist* indicates a major revision of his thought, because there is good reason to believe that Plato's main target was someone other than himself.

In lieu of the developmental interpretations of the *Sophist*, I will now offer my own view that the *Sophist* is an exercise in intellectual purification (what I mean by "intellectual purification" will be made clear in the following discussion). While this interpretation complements my view that the technical part of the dialogue is meant as a refutation of Gorgias, it is not simply a restatement of that position. One may take this view even if he finds my discussion of *On Not-Being* unsatisfying, because the justification for this position is found in parts of the dialogue preceding the philosophical content I purport to be linked to that work.

Plato's dialogues are literary works, and because of this it is important to attend closely to the literary structure of each dialogue. In particular, we should expect the first few lines of each dialogue to contain some clue regarding its overall meaning, especially if these opening remarks seem out-of-place in a natural discussion. This is precisely the case in the *Sophist*. Theodorus opens the dialogue with a few mundane remarks that establish the dramatic date of the dialogue and the character of the Visitor. Socrates' response, however, is peculiar. "Are you bringing a visitor, Theodorus?" Socrates asks. "Or are you bringing a god without realizing it instead? ... Your visitor might be a greater power following along with you, a sort of *god of refutation* to keep watch on us and show how bad we are at speaking—and to *refute* us."<sup>47</sup> This remark is clearly outside the bounds of conventional greetings, so we must assume Plato placed this line in Socrates' mouth in order to call attention to the notion of refutation and its connection to philosophy. This is reinforced by Theodorus' response: "He *is* divine—but then I call all philosophers that."<sup>48</sup> Since the last reference to divinity involved refutation, we should infer that philosophers, insofar as they are divine, act as agents of refutation.

Once the Visitor selects Theaetetus as a partner and proceeds to "hunt" for the sophist, the discussion of refutation is abandoned until 226b, when the Visitor ostensibly begins the sixth definition of the sophist. This kind of sophist is a purifier of souls, one who employs refutation to rid the soul of false beliefs. The reader should immediately associate this definition with Socrates' opening lines, and therefore should recognize this instance of the "sophist" as the *philosopher*, the divine agent of refutation.

Plato sets this account of "noble sophistry" immediately before the final account of the sophist as a maker of false images—and hence right before the technical discussion of that-which-is-not. Since the discussion of that-which-is-not is essentially a refutation of certain ways of thinking and speaking about that-which-is-not, it seems clear that Plato means for the reader to view this discussion in light of the remarks about purification that appear immediately before it and at the beginning of the dialogue.

Why is this important? So far I have established only that Plato uses poetic license in describing the importance of refutation. But purification was a foundational concept in ancient Greek religion, associated with both Apollo and the mystery cult of Asclepius.<sup>49</sup> Plato incorporates the notion of purification into his own philosophy, and its importance becomes even clearer when we realize its relation to one's ability to philosophize. Plato believed that in order to engage in true philosophy the philosopher's soul must first be in an appropriate condition—that is, the philosopher's soul must be purified. The longest sustained discussion of purification occurs in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates famously dictates, "The one aim of those who practice

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 216a-b (emphasis mine).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 216c (emphasis White's).

<sup>49</sup> Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 28.

philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.”<sup>50</sup> It is important to emphasize that this is not a *conclusion* that follows on one’s study of Platonic metaphysics. One does not first contemplate the Forms, and then, discovering that the spiritual is higher than the physical, realize that the best life is one lived in maximal separation from the body. Socrates claims that “the soul reasons best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality.”<sup>51</sup> It is clear from Socrates’ statement that this training for death must come before the “search for reality” is even possible. The philosopher thus must undertake certain existential, intellectual, and (at least in Neoplatonic schools) even dietary practices to purify the soul before beginning to contemplate metaphysical truth.<sup>52</sup>

According to the Visitor, “the principal and most important kind of [purification]” is refutation.<sup>53</sup> Before one can do metaphysics, one must “clear the ground,” as it were, so that metaphysics becomes intellectually possible. The Visitor earlier states, “the people who [purify] the soul... likewise think the soul, too, won’t get any advantage from any learning that’s offered to it until someone shames it by *refuting* it, removes the opinions that interfere with learning, and exhibits it [purified].”<sup>54</sup> This is most clearly seen in the Visitor’s treatment of the hypothetical materialist “giants,” whom he regards as subscribing to intellectual assumptions that make them unable to discuss *being* correctly. The Visitor does not reform the giants and make them amenable to accepting the existence of an immaterial soul because he was too lazy to prove them wrong. That would simply beg the question in favor of his anti-materialist metaphysics. The Visitor instead realizes that one cannot debate the materialists in their current intellectual condition. Discussion is impossible with “a trouble-maker,”<sup>55</sup> as he points out in the beginning of the dialogue. By reforming his hypothetical opponents so that “they’re willing to answer less wildly than they actually do,”<sup>56</sup> the Visitor *purifies* them, albeit without going through the actual process, since he is ultimately “not concerned” with their real-life materialist counterparts.<sup>57</sup> The Visitor is concerned instead with purifying Theaetetus (and the reader) of false beliefs and ways of speaking about Being.

What does this mean for our interpretation of the dialogue? First, as already noted, this reading accords well with my view that the *Sophist* polemically targets the doctrine found in *On Not-Being*. If Plato seeks to purify his readers from false beliefs, then we must ask from where these false beliefs arose, and why these false beliefs were so widespread among his audience. The answer I advocate is that these false beliefs, at least in part, stemmed from the teachings of the sophists, and especially Gorgias’ *On Not-Being*.

Second, the purificatory reading of the *Sophist* strengthens my claims about the thesis that Plato’s thought underwent revision. If purification is temporally prior to and existentially

---

<sup>50</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 64a, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in John Cooper, ed., *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997): 49-100.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 65c.

<sup>52</sup> For a more thorough discussion of purification in the *Phaedo* as well as a more concrete explanation of the purificatory practices endorsed by the Platonic tradition, see Mark Anderson, *Pure: Modernity, Philosophy, and the One* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2009), 71-106.

<sup>53</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 230d. White translates *katharsis* as “cleansing,” but it also means “purification.”

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 230c-d, emphasis mine. The bracketed words were derivatives of *katharsis* (see n. 53, above).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 217d.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 246d.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 246d.

necessary for the practice of “doing metaphysics,” then this practice is not the same as doing metaphysics. If Plato is not even doing metaphysics in the *Sophist*, then *a fortiori* he is not *revising* his metaphysics there. White notes, for example, that “on one interpretation [the *Sophist*] does not even mention Forms, and although it uses the term *eidōs* it does not on this interpretation use it to mean the ‘Forms’ of Plato’s metaphysical doctrine,” and that for this reason many have taken this as an indication that Plato has serious misgivings about his theory.<sup>58</sup> For the sake of argument, let us grant the contention that the *Sophist* does not mention the Forms *at all*. As before, this does not mean that Plato rejects the Forms in favor of some sort of “linguistic turn” toward “the logical behavior of concepts.”<sup>59</sup> Many of the concerns of the *Sophist* are clearly linguistic—Socrates’ opening line mentions “how bad we are at speaking”<sup>60</sup>—but this merely means that it is not Plato’s goal to lay out the complete workings of the Forms. Rather, he is developing in *Theaetetus*, as well as in the reader, the intellectual conditions under which metaphysical inquiry is possible. As long as we are trapped by the sophists’ puzzles stemming from our naïve habits when talking about being, we will be unable to believe any metaphysical propositions about the Forms. We are free to postulate, as does Silverman, that the *Sophist* shows Plato’s thought “developed” in the sense that he entertained “new worries” or questions that had not previously concerned him, namely the precise nature of the relations between Forms.<sup>61</sup> Yet, on the reading I have suggested, it becomes difficult to state conclusively that Plato fundamentally reworked his old views or abandoned them altogether.

To conclude, the *Sophist* is an important dialogue with significant implications for metaphysics, language, and Platonic interpretation in general. And, as we have seen, there is ample evidence in both the dramatic and philosophical sections of the *Sophist*, as well as other dialogues, that Plato constructed these arguments as a response to Gorgias’ *On Not-Being*. Furthermore, Plato saw these arguments as an intellectual purification, propaedeutic to the true study of philosophy. Given the philosophical importance of the arguments, it is certainly a great folly to consider them in isolation from Gorgias’ text and Plato’s intentions. Only by restoring the *Sophist* to the philosophical context in which it was written can we hope to understand the meaning and motivation of its doctrine.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> White, introduction to Plato, *Soph.*, vii-viii.

<sup>59</sup> Allan Silverman uses these terms to characterize interpretations of the *Sophist* that follow Gilbert Ryle’s (an interpretation he does not himself follow). See Silverman, *Dialectic of Essence*, 142.

<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Soph.* 216b.

<sup>61</sup> Silverman, *Dialectic of Essence*, 138.

<sup>62</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Mark Anderson (Belmont University) for discussing these ideas with me and suggesting some early revisions. I would also like to thank the editorial staff of *Ex Nihilo*—particularly Pavel Nitchovski, Justin Olaguer, and Lauren Goldman—for their comments and revisions.

## Heidegger, Avatar, & the Gulf of Mexico Oil Leak

Omar Quinonez

### Abstract:

Heidegger's insights into the totalitarian and ontological essence of technology function as an axiomatic principle in understanding the unfolding dynamics of the Gulf of Mexico oil leak. Two points are derived from this analysis: firstly, the oil leak has been portrayed as a huge destruction of economic resources for the fishing, restaurant, and hotel industries prominent in the region. These in turn are all subscribers of *Gestell* and its standing-reserve nature. The opportunity to encounter beings as either standing-forth or being-with is obliterated. There remains but one form of disclosing beings: standing-reserve. Secondly, the analysis of the dynamics unleashed by the oil leak requires turning Heidegger 'right side up' with regards to technology. That is, *Vorhanden* or 'present-at-hand' is predominantly pushed by the economic relations derived from the essence of capitalism. The philosophical background against which the film *Avatar* takes place further reinforces the necessity of turning Heidegger 'right side up,' with the same essence of technology but 180 degrees around. If a change in the 'en-framing' ability of the essence of technology is to occur, this change can only take place if the ontic fundamental structures of the essence of capitalism are uprooted; in other words, the problem is materialistic. It is the essence of techno-capitalism.

### ... Beginning from the Beginning

As this paper is being written, crude oil emerging out of a broken pipe 5,000 feet under the sea has finally stopped leaking for the first time. For eighty-six days up to 100,000 barrels of crude oil flooded freely into the ocean, threatening the existence of the ecosystem and becoming the worst environmental crisis in U.S. history.<sup>1</sup> However, beneath the countless reports, statistics, and articles bombarding news stations every day, there lies a more fundamental and dark philosophical issue. This issue is none other than the unfolding dynamics of the essence of technology in the twenty-first century. That is, what has been revealed during the Deep Water Horizon rig explosion are not the effects of uncontrolled amounts of oil gushing into the ocean, but the operation of the essence of technology and its totalitarian 'en-framing' nature.

I claim that Heidegger's insights into the essence of technology can function as an axiomatic point in understanding what really happened on April 20, 2010, and the dynamics that have unfolded after the dawn of the oil leak. Two points are derived from this analysis: firstly, the oil leak has been portrayed as a huge destruction of economic resources for the fishing, restaurant, and hotel industries prominent in the region. This portrayal of the spill, however, presupposes an understanding of beings as standing-reserve—as only a resource for human purposes and nothing else. Secondly, the dynamics unleashed by the oil leak require turning Heidegger 'right side up' with regards to technology. That is, the essence of technology is predominantly pushed by the economic relations derived from capitalism. It is capitalism that pushes and actualizes the essence of technology through its quest for profit. It is capitalism that

---

<sup>1</sup> Sheila Pulham, Eric Hilaire, Chris Fenn, "BP Oil Spill: An Interactive Timeline," *The Guardian*, last modified September 28, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/interactive/2010/jul/08/bp-oil-spill-timeline-interactive>.

stands at the heart of the essence of technology. It is thus not the essence of technology alone but the essence of techno-capitalism.

The background against which the film *Avatar* takes place further reinforces the necessity of turning Heidegger ‘right side up’ and discloses the relationship between the essence of technology and capitalism. The imperialistic attitude of humans in attempting to colonize the lands of the indigenous people has, in its core, the necessity of obtaining precious resources. What is holy ground for the aborigine people, for humans, is a resource; it is simply the essence of technology at work. However, this is closely tied to the economic relations of capitalism in its quest for profit and its dynamics back home on Earth. The oil leak and *Avatar*, thus, are two perfect examples of Heidegger’s essence of technology, the same essence of technology but 180 degrees around. If a change in the ‘en-framing’ ability of the essence of technology is to occur, this change can only take place if the fundamental structures of the essence of capitalism are uprooted; in other words, the problem is materialistic.

### **Heidegger (Re)loaded**

Before engaging in any discussion, it is necessary to review ten concepts in Heidegger’s philosophy relevant for this analysis. In what follows I will review Heidegger’s understanding of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, *Zuhanden*, being-with-others, standing-forth, the essence of technology, *Vorhanden*, ‘thrownness,’ resoluteness, and authenticity.

Heidegger begins his project with a phenomenological account of the nature of beings. He believes this method will reveal the phenomena as it is in itself, prior to any theoretical analysis.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Heidegger’s project is pre-theoretical since it is concerned with the nature of the phenomena of being *as it is*, without imposing any theory on it. As Heidegger said it, “to the things themselves!”<sup>3</sup> The question for Heidegger is then: what fundamentally goes on in our daily living and what does it reveal about the nature of being itself?

Heidegger’s answer is that the nature of our being is not that of the commander I, but rather that of *Dasein*, or being-there. That is to say, the nature of our being is not the commanding and abstract *cogito*, but rather that which always exists in a relationship with the world around it. If the nature of our being is stripped out of its relations with the world, then our being itself collapses. Thus, it is always already being-there. It is always already *Dasein*. This is a revolutionary phenomenological move in the sense that it departs from the traditional position in which our being’s nature is rooted in a strict distinction between subject and object, between the world and I.<sup>4</sup>

Further, *Dasein*’s being-there can only mean one thing: that it is always already in-the-world. This means that *Dasein* is always in a pre-thematic relationship to the objects of its day-to-day being. In our daily living we encounter beings. But what is fundamentally important is that we do not encounter other beings as objective entities of our cognitive interpretations. The way we relate to things is pre-thematic; that is, we already are in a relationship with other things before we may take the task of analyzing them. When I grab a pencil to write I do not first encounter the object as a neutral thing that must be analyzed to decide what it is, or what it can be used for. When I grab a pencil I already encounter it as a thing-for, as a being that is *for* writing. Furthermore, it is the fact that we already relate to other things as being-for-something that we understand the usefulness of such thing. This usefulness is what Heidegger referred to as

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2008), 72-86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, (New York: Continuum, 2003), 97-119.

*Zuhanden*; that is, a particular way of encountering things in which they are disclosed to us in the form of their usefulness, or what Heidegger calls ready-at-hand.<sup>5</sup> A pencil is useful for writing, a glass for drinking, and a bed for sleeping.

It now should be clear why Heidegger believed the nature of being, *Dasein*, is always-already related to the world. It is not possible to make an analysis of the world and of *Dasein* separately, precisely because the former is always constituted by being related to the latter; by understanding the pencil as an object for writing, the hammer for hammering, or in other words, the possibilities of beings.

But just as *Dasein* is always already related to the world it must also be related to the other *Daseins* who are also in-the-world. In my being-in-the-world, I am already related to other *Daseins*, just as I am fundamentally related to things. Heidegger refers to this characteristic as an existential, a characteristic that is revealed in the existence of *Dasein*. He refers to it as being-with *Mit-sein*.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, *Dasein*'s in-the-world encounter with other *Daseins* is not experienced in the sense of being-at-hand, not in the same way as the hammer is experienced. It experiences other humans in the form of their acknowledgement as *Daseins*, as beings who are also fully in-the-world and fully in-and-for-themselves. The way in which *Dasein* relates to similar beings is in the form of care.<sup>7</sup> That is, it has the existential capacity of caring for other *Daseins*, even in their complete absence. It is the capacity of missing someone who has not yet arrived for dinner.

Moving on, Heidegger introduces the Greek term *phusis* to refer to the natural world. By *phusis*, he means "the arising of something from out of itself."<sup>8</sup> That is, nature is that which stands in itself, and as such, it is encountered phenomenologically by *Dasein* as that which is fully independent. When we construct a covered railroad platform there is always already a consideration for bad weather, for the independence of nature that stands-forth to challenge *Dasein* in taking into account its presence.<sup>9</sup> The flower emerges from out of itself, the lion challenges *Dasein* by standing-forth in its independence, as does the approaching hurricane.

Furthermore, Heidegger believed the contemporary modern age suffers from an overemphasis of one particular way of encountering beings. This overemphasis closes the ontological possibilities of encountering beings in any other way, such as standing-forth, ready-at-hand (*Zuhanden*), or being-with. It is the age of what Heidegger calls 'the essence of technology.' In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger depicts a reality in which the essence of modern technology reigns freely in a totalitarian fashion. The essence of modern technology, says Heidegger, is nothing technological but rather a quality to 'en-frame,' to disclose reality in a very specific way: standing-reserve.<sup>10</sup> This en-framing ability he calls *Gestell*.

But what exactly is *Gestell*? It is the ability to necessarily disclose reality in only one particular way. As such, it is totalitarian. That is, rather than encountering in the world other *Daseins* in the form of care, nature in the form of standing-forth, and objects as ready-at-hand, the essence of technology discloses everything in one way only. It allows only for standing-reserve. For the specific way of encountering beings as only a resource for something, not as

<sup>5</sup> Hans Ruin, *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret Davis, (Durham: Acumen, 2010), 186.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, 155-164.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-198.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature*, (New York: Humanity Books, 1995), 7.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 336-337.

ready-at-hand, but a more extreme version called present-at-hand. A hydroelectric power plant is itself worth nothing; it is only something to be used for something else. It is standing-reserve. It is what Heidegger calls *Bestand*.<sup>11</sup> In present-at-hand, or what is known as *Vorhanden*, there is no pre-thematic relationship to the object as with the hammer. Rather, the object is alienated from *Dasein* and reduced to only a resource-for, something to be used for-the-sake-of something else.<sup>12</sup>

Modern science is for Heidegger a product of the essence of technology. In science objects are stripped of their pre-thematic relations to *Dasein* and presented as alienated, independent, neutral, and many times reduced to standing-reserve (e.g. hydroelectric plant).<sup>13</sup> What troubled Heidegger is not so much the existence of this way of encountering beings, but the ‘en-framing’ quality of the essence of technology in which beings can only be encountered in this particular way and no other.<sup>14</sup> Heidegger understood that modern technology is necessary for expanding the horizon of our material possibilities, but he was concerned with the out-of-control expansion of understanding beings as just present-at-hand, instigated by the totalitarian composition of ‘en-framing.’<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is not as if modern humans have mastered technology; rather technology has enslaved them, since they have become unaware of the possibility of encountering beings in other ways.

Finally, *Dasein* holds the possibility of coming to terms with its existence so as to prepare for a free and healthy relationship to technology. It must come to terms with its ‘thrownness’ by becoming resolute and finally authentic. For Heidegger, ‘thrownness’ is understood as the condition in which all beings like *Dasein* are in relation to the world. *Dasein* does not choose its historical epoch, its family, its material conditions, and its country of birth.<sup>16</sup> Even more, it does not choose the meanings and interpretation of the world. That is, the world is not revealed to *Dasein* as a blank slate into which it can write what it likes. On the contrary, it receives the world as something which already has meaning, morality, and structure. In this sense, it is not born into a world in which it can create whatever life it likes. *Dasein* is in fact thrown into an already-developed world, a world that limits its possibilities of being.

Nevertheless, Heidegger believed *Dasein* must understand the inevitability of its ‘thrownness,’ and of its condition as an entity with a finite number of open possibilities in its horizon. It must embrace its inevitable predicament in the form being resolute towards its condition.<sup>17</sup> In a way, resoluteness brings to *Dasein* a true sense of freedom since it allows it to take ownership of its historical and thrown condition. Through this, *Dasein* can become an authentic being, since it would face its real conditions of existence. It would also experience guilt, not towards its moral errors, but towards the failure of seizing and realizing its possibilities of being.<sup>18</sup> By understanding its ‘thrownness,’ *Dasein* can realize about its captivity under the essence of technology, since this captivity is part of the world into which it was thrown. By understanding this, it can become not only resolute of the fact of its condition, but demand a way of liberating itself from the totalitarian aspect of technology. It can demand the freedom to seize

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Ruin, 186, 190.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Metcalf, class lecture, April 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, 174-179.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 230-235.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the possibilities of being-in-the-world. In other words, it can arm itself for the struggle against the essence of technology, a struggle that captivated the late Heidegger so much.

### **An Oil Disaster? Or the Triumph of Technology?**

June 15<sup>th</sup> 2010 was the evening on which President Barack Obama addressed the United States public with regards to the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster. June 15<sup>th</sup> 2010 was the evening on which President Obama showed the unconscious power of the essence of technology at work. What was meant to be an eloquent and comprehensive speech culminated in him disclosing the *modus operandis* of the essence of technology. He was unaware that over him reigns *Gestell*.

The first glances of this appear almost immediately. President Obama explained to the public: “tonight, I’ve returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you about the battle we’re waging against an oil spill that is assaulting our shores and our citizens.”<sup>19</sup> What does this statement conceal? Precisely the following: the oil spill is first of all presented as an independent event, as if it was an ontologically independent being that has descended upon us to cause problems. It obscures and neglects any possibility of a gross overuse of the essence of technology and the *Bestand* way of encountering beings. But, the president cannot say this, because the essence of technology effectively limits his scope of understanding beings and events. Further, it conceals the selfish destruction of the habitat of countless plant and animal species that had no role in this incident. They are simply grouped as part of what is believed to be our shores, our resource. But this is not a criticism of the president. How could it be? He is only speaking under the unconscious power of *Gestell* that has overtaken the modern age. It rather is an exposition of how the essence of technology limits the possibility of thinking and being.

Later on the speech, President Obama made a further remark that unconsciously defends the essence of technology. He argued:

For generations, men and women who call this region home have made their living from the water. That living is now in jeopardy. I’ve talked to shrimpers and fishermen who don’t know how they’re going to support their families this year. I’ve seen empty docks and restaurants with fewer customers—even in areas where the beaches are not yet affected. I’ve talked to owners of shops and hotels who wonder when the tourists will start to come back. The sadness and anger they feel is not just about the money they’ve lost. It’s about a wrenching anxiety that their way of life may be lost.<sup>20</sup>

The quasi-Heideggerian remarks about fisherman dwelling in the gulf coast and the anxiety produced by the collapse of their world should not deceive us. The fishermen’s livelihood is not based on Heidegger’s idea of the traditional farmer who couples with the earth to secure its existence. Rather, it is based on the modern and technological conception of the *cogito*, the I, as the unchallengeable master who is ontologically separated from the world, and as such, moves in to impose its will and dominate the beings in it. In the above statement there is absolutely no acknowledgement, implicit or explicit, of the possibility of an ontological relation to the world and the different beings in it. On the contrary, it only reinforces the ‘en-framing’ ability of the

---

<sup>19</sup> “President Obama’s Oval Office Address on BP Oil Spill & Energy,” *The White House*, last modified June 15, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/president-obama-s-oval-office-address-bp-oil-spill-energy>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

world as a resource for an unrelated *Dasein*. It reinforces the idea that the spill is important but only because fishermen manipulate and use the fish as a resource.

This is not to say that President Obama *must be* a Heideggerian. To think this would be to miss the point. Rather what it means is that this view never leaves another option. The essence of technology always already ‘en-frames’ reality in a specific way and allows for no further analysis regarding our relations to beings and the world. It becomes common knowledge to think in accordance with *Gestell*, and as such, the President’s statements bring to light how this is the case. The statements also show how any possibility of controlling the essence of technology is lost, since one is unaware even of the probability that it exists. One is effectively enslaved by the technological world-view and not the other way around.

President Obama’s answer to the disaster further brings to light how the essence of technology is *the* only effective option. He decided to dispatch a group of scientists to assess the disaster. But, are not scientists the perfect representation of a world compatible with the essence of technology? After all, they pioneered the understanding of the world as a mechanical dimension, with the I, the *cogito*, as the only capable entity of imposing its will and desires upon the neutral and alien beings. The words of Noam Chomsky might be of help:

You don’t have to go back very far to find gratuitous torture of animals. In Cartesian philosophy, for example . . . the Cartesians thought they had proven that humans had minds and everything else in the world was a machine. So there’s no difference between a cat and a watch, let’s say. It’s just the cat is a little more complicated.

You go back to the court in the seventeenth century and big smart guys who studied all that stuff and thought they understood it would, as a sport, take lady so-and-so’s favorite dog and kick it and beat it to death and laugh, saying, this silly lady doesn’t understand the latest philosophy, which was that it was just like dropping a rock on the floor. That’s gratuitous torture of animals. It was regarded as if we would ask a question about the torturing of a rock. You can’t do it, there’s no way to torture a rock.<sup>21</sup>

The strict separation of the subject and the object provides the philosophical foundation for the understanding of objects as alien and neutral, and as such, as a possible resource. This is why Heidegger believed that modern science is intimately related to a technological world-view.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, it can be the case that, to the surprise of many, scientists end up becoming the group that in fact acknowledges the impossibility of reducing wildlife to simple *Bestand*—to a resource. Nevertheless, even when this is the case, the defense in favor of the irreducibility of wildlife leaves untouched the basic principles of a subject separated from its world. In other words, even though scientists might argue for the protection of wildlife, this argument, in virtue of the axiomatic foundations of their fields, still presupposes an understanding and a relationship to such beings as something ontologically separated from humans. Hence, the possibility of going further than a technological world-view in the scientists’ assessment of the leak is obliterated.

To close up his speech, President Obama declared that his administration will ensure the necessary regulations and investment in clean technology will render another spill virtually

---

<sup>21</sup> Noam Chomsky, Michael Albert, “Conversations Between Michael Albert and Noam Chomsky Pt. 3,” *Znet: A Community of People Committed to Social Change*, last modified December 22, 2008, <http://www.zcommunications.org/conversations-between-michael-albert-and-noam-chomsky-pt-3-by-noam-chomsky>.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Ruin, 191.

impossible. However, once again, beneath the superfluous excitement for such technology lies a darker reality. That is, the most comprehensive answer to the oil disaster is the invention of more technology. This is not to say that green technology is wrong, but rather it is to say that we have never been in the possibility of understanding the philosophical problems of a technological world-view and how to control them. Instead, the only option has always been: more technology.

There are two last examples of how the oil leak has brought to light the workings of *Gestell* from the government's part. Firstly, Obama assured that the oil leak is "an assault on our shore, on our people, and on our economy."<sup>23</sup> Where is the sense of 'ourness' derived from? It is derived from the 'en-framing' characteristic of technology. The shores are ours because we manipulate them, we use them and transform them, and we thus own them. The economy is ours because we catch the fish in the water, and then we transform them into profit, reinvest it, and begin the cycle again. This reflects not the fact that we exploit nature, for that has to be done, but rather how rooted the idea is that it must be done from the perspective of the commander I. That is, from the perspective of the unrelated subject exploiting the neutral and alien beings around it—from the perspective of technology.

Secondly, the most accepted principle of the oil disaster, taken almost as an obvious truism, is the idea that BP should pay to repair what has been destroyed. But, what is the philosophical background behind this idea? A comment from Philosopher Slavoj Žižek will shed light into it:

Unfortunately, it was President Obama whose condemnation of the ridiculous spectacle of the three companies was ridiculous in its own way. What is ridiculously-naïve is the idea that a private company, no matter how rich, can pay for the entire damage of a serious ecological catastrophe. If the worst that we fear will happen and the spilling will go on for a long time, then the damage to the environment and to the millions of people living (not only) there is simply irreparable—it would be like demanding from the Nazis that they cover the full price of the holocaust. The lesson is simply that, while market mechanisms may work up to a certain level to contain ecological damage, serious large-scale ecological catastrophes are simply out of their reach.<sup>24</sup>

What I am concerned with here is not so much the economics. Rather, what I wish to point out is that the all-too-fast acceptance of BP paying for the damage it caused presupposes an important point. It presupposes that damaged wildlife and the ecosystem can be repaired with money. Why? Because as long as the economic damage can be repaired, as long as new fish can be grown, businesses can be revived, and the economic loss can be turned around, then everything is fine. There is nothing else to fix, no remainder. This, of course, works only inasmuch as fisheries, wildlife in general, and shores, are perceived as simply a resource, as *Bestand*. As long as they have no value in themselves apart from the value derived from their capacity to be used for something.

If the argument is pushed further it breaks fairly quickly. Sums of money cannot repair the death of a person, in the sense of bringing him or her back, nor can money repair the psychological damage caused by events such as the Holocaust. Such damage was done against beings that we perceive as in-and-for-themselves beings—as *Daseins*. Why can money not

---

<sup>23</sup> "President Obama Assesses BP Oil Spill Response," *The White House*, last modified May 28, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/president-obama-assesses-bp-oil-spill-response>.

<sup>24</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Two Types of Offshore Drilling," *Southbank Centre: Literature Blog*, last modified July 8, 2010, <http://litandspoken.southbankcentre.co.uk/2010/07/08/slavoj-zizek-two-types-of-off-shore-drilling/>.

correct the Holocaust but can correct the damage of the oil leak? Because the essence of technology has ‘en-framed’ this event and it always already ‘en-frames’ for standing-reserve, for the encountering of beings as only a resource. If humans have already been ‘en-framed’ in taking beings as resource, then of course the monetary reparation of that resource could fix it all.

Moving on, on the other side of the institutional spectrum is British Petroleum. BP’s record in the aftermath of the oil leak sheds light into what philosophical background is operating behind the oil disaster. BP’s current CEO is Tony Hayward, whose comments and ‘philosophical analysis’ have made headlines. To start off, we can take a look at the statements he made to *The Guardian*: "The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume."<sup>25</sup>

What does the statement reveal? Well, besides being a public relations mistake, the statement encapsulates the philosophy of the company. The statement means that the damage caused by the thousands and thousands of barrels of oil leaking can be absorbed by a vast ocean. There is nothing to worry about as long as the ocean and its ecosystem can absorb it without collapsing. The darkness of this statement comes to light better when we shift the argument around. BP makes an average of 21 billion dollars in profit a year (after taxation).<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it could be argued that BP’s profits are substantially large, and it would thus be fine if it gives every U.S. citizen an equal share out of a quarter’s profits. Of course, BP would quickly reject this statement, but why? It is because profit is more important to BP than even the Gulf of Mexico or its ecosystem. Tony Hayward reflects the traditional technological vision; we can manipulate, transform, and reduce to resource every being we like as long as it does not damage *our* interests in the use of those beings as for-the-sake-of.

Furthermore, if another ecological catastrophe were to take place, forcing the government to indefinitely stop any drilling in the gulf, then BP would be concerned with the protection of the ecosystem. Why? Not because it cares about the impact of the disaster on the beings that dwell in the ocean, but rather because by protecting the ecosystem it would be allowed to drill again. What could be seen first as an altruistic action reveals itself not to be so at all. It is born out of the resource-minded essence of technology.

BP has displayed an adherence to *Gestell* that goes even further. It goes after *Dasein* and its reluctance to be reduced to standing-reserve. In June 2010, BP came under criticism for hiring a firm that specialized in “reducing our client’s loss dollar pay-outs,” meaning reducing the amount of money BP will have to pay out to the people who have been directly hurt by the spill.<sup>27</sup> BP’s attempt to minimize its payout can only mean one thing: through their actions, their attempt to reduce their financial responsibility regardless of suffering, BP has shown how it has reduced *Daseins* to numbers. A reduction from an in-and-for-itself being to the amount of money the individual will cost BP. That is, from the richness of the human *Dasein* to numbers in a spreadsheet. Thus, even *Dasein* is not immune to being reduced to *Bestand* as the dynamics of the oil spill unfold.

Moreover, the use of oil dispersants during the disaster sheds further light on the influence of the essence of technology. The logic behind the use of these chemicals is that as

<sup>25</sup> “BP Boss Admits Job on the Line over Gulf Oil Spill,” *The Guardian*, last modified May 14, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/may/13/bp-boss-admits-mistakes-gulf-oil-spill>.

<sup>26</sup> “Annual Reports and Accounts 2009,” *BP*, last modified 2009, [http://www.bp.com/assets/bp\\_internet/globalbp/globalbp\\_uk\\_english/set\\_branch/STAGING/common\\_assets/downloads/pdf/BP\\_Annual\\_Report\\_and\\_Accounts\\_2009.pdf](http://www.bp.com/assets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/set_branch/STAGING/common_assets/downloads/pdf/BP_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2009.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> “Headlines for June 11, 2010,” *Democracy Now!*, last modified June 11, 2010, <http://www.democracynow.org/2010/6/11/headlines#3>.

they are poured into the ocean they will begin to break up the oil, thus forcing it down in the water column and away from affecting the coastal line.<sup>28</sup> They are supposed to be “a necessary evil to limit the damage” of the spill.<sup>29</sup> However, a group of scientists have warned about the level of toxicity of the chemicals, the most popular of which is known as Corexit. They have also warned about the two billion gallons used by BP. Furthermore, scientists have raised serious concerns about the unknown toxic effects of the dispersant:

No one will tell you using dispersants won't have an effect. You're trading one species for another. The long-term effects are unknown. The dispersant has an inherent toxicity. And these oil droplets tend to be the same size as food particles for filter-feeding organisms . . . ‘Dispersants . . . are toxic to marine life, so there are trade-offs to consider,’ David Pettit of the Natural Resources Defense Council told the Washington Post last week. ‘And just because humans can't see oil on the surface doesn't mean it's not still in the water column, affecting marine life from plankton to whales.’<sup>30</sup>

If the dispersants could be so toxic, and if nobody really knows what their effects on marine life or the long-term consequences of using them are, why is BP using them so eagerly and in such massive quantities? The answer to the question lies in the nature of the event from BP's perspective. BP is concerned with the backlash it could receive once the huge amounts of oil start reaching the coast, and therefore trying to keep the oil deep down in the ocean seems logical. Where does the essence of technology fit into this? It fits precisely as a component of the core of BP's thinking. The company's attempt to keep the oil away from the shore already presupposes an understanding, not of marine life this time, but rather of the entire ocean as its resource, as standing-reserve for protecting the company. The ocean is not taken by BP to be *phusis* as Heidegger understood it, but rather simply as a resource to limit its responsibility in the disaster. As a consequence, marine life, workers applying for the dispersants, and the fauna in which marine life dwells, are all reduced to *Bestand* for the purpose of BP's interests. Thus, the essence of technology is already in operation behind BP's thinking with regards to the use of dispersants.

Just as striking are the attacks on the use of dispersants coming from the fishermen. “[T]hey are afraid the dispersants could create a series of widespread dead zones in the gulf, contaminating or killing marine life.”<sup>31</sup> Are they concerned because they have suddenly turned into environmentalists? Not at all. What they are concerned about is this: “‘Our entire seafood industry in the gulf is at risk here,’ said Williams, whose group represents shrimpers from North Carolina to Texas.”<sup>32</sup> *Gestell*'s role in the oil leak is exemplified perfectly by this statement. On one side is BP's use of the ocean as a resource, as *Bestand* for protecting the company. On the other side are the affected fishermen who are concerned with the destruction of marine life, but concerned because they use fish as a resource, as standing-reserve for economic gain.

---

<sup>28</sup> Elisabeth Rosenthal, “In Gulf of Mexico, a Huge Experiment with Chemical Dispersants,” *The New York Times*, Section A; Colum 0; National Desk; 22, app. LexisNexis, last modified May 6, 2010, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Peter Beaumont, “Toxic Chemical Fear over BP's Oil Clean-up: Scientists Warn of Dangers to Sea Life from Latest Effort to Contain Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill,” *The Observer*, 11, app. LexisNexis, last modified May 16, 2010, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/>.

<sup>31</sup> Craig Pittman, “Fishermen Question Use of Dispersants,” *St. Petersburg Times*, National; 1A, app. LexisNexis, last modified May 12, 2010, <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/Inacademic/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

This is the predicament of the aftermath of the oil leak. Whether it is the government, BP, or the fish industry, there is but one denominator: the ‘en-framing’ essence of technology and its total control over the ontological horizon of reality. That is, its total control over the ways in which beings can be disclosed and encountered.

**Heidegger is Standing on his Head,  
He Must be Turned Right Side Up**

Karl Marx once commented that the “mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel’s hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.”<sup>33</sup> I want to claim the same holds true for Heidegger and technology. What I mean by this is that as Heidegger became involved with the ‘en-framing’ quality of *Gestell*, he “made the right step in the wrong direction.”<sup>34</sup> He overlooked the crucial element of political economy. As Slavoj Žižek’s *Parallax View* points out:

When Heidegger talks about technology, he systematically ignores the whole sphere of modern ‘political’ economy, although modern technology is not only empirically, but in its very concept, rooted in the market dynamics of generating surplus-value. The underlying principle which impels the unrelenting drive for modern productivity is not technological, but economic: it is the market and commodity principle of surplus-value which condemns capitalism to the crazy dynamics of permanent self-revolutionizing.<sup>35</sup>

Because of this insistence on relying on the ontological, Heidegger missed the ontic mechanisms which maintain, promote, and protect, the privilege position of the essence of technology in the modern era. It is the dynamics of modern capitalism, its essence grounded in the production of surplus-value, that ultimately maintain the rate of gross overuse of *Vorhanded*.<sup>36</sup> This holds true, I claim, for the way in which the essence of technology was pushed during the oil leak. But before that, looking at the film *Avatar* will provide an insight into the relationship of capitalism and the essence of technology.

*Avatar* depicts the cold and horrendous imperialism of humans who are pushed by the greed of multinational, or in this case multi-planetary, corporations. Human colonizers are pushed to the planet of the aborigine population in the search of natural resources. Representatives from a multi-planetary corporation want to infiltrate mercenaries into the indigenous communities to persuade them into relocating to another area since they sit on top of huge quantities of natural resources. When the operation fails, the commanding forces of the corporation lose patience and decide to remove them by force. The aborigines fight back, led by the mercenary who was supposed to convince them to relocate. In the end the corporation wins, but not without losing some of its mercenaries to the side of aborigines; literally so, since one of them decided to morphologically transform himself into an indigenous being.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: Critique of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 103.

<sup>34</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, (London: Verso, 2008), 95.

<sup>35</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 277.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Eldred, “Capital and Technology: Marx and Heidegger,” *Artefact*, last modified January 17, 2011, <http://192.220.96.165/capiteen.html>.

<sup>37</sup> *Avatar*, Directed by James Cameron, (2009; Los Angeles CA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2010), DVD.

What this film depicts is nothing more than the essence of technology, but an essence of technology that is ultimately inseparable from the production of surplus-value. Human colonizers are pushed into the planet of the aborigine population precisely because they know ‘something’ exists which can produce profit for the stockholders of the corporation. That ‘something’ is a natural resource (the petroleum of the twenty-second century, let us say) which is unfortunately located in the holy lands of the indigenous people. Such neo-petroleum resource is in fact resource (for humans) in the Heideggerian sense—it is *Bestand*. It is standing-reserve to obtain something else. It also is the victim of ‘en-framing’ by the essence of technology since it is always encountered in one way. We can observe here *Gestell* at its purest. The aborigine population has come closer to understand, in the Heideggerian sense, the ontological relations between *Dasein* and its world. That is, nature as standing-forth, *Dasein* as being-with, and things as ready-at-hand. They can thus be understood as more authentic and resolute than the colonizer human beings.

The colonizers, on the other hand, cannot understand the beings around them in the same way. They see, hear, and talk, but one thing: *Bestand*. The sacred lands of the indigenous population can only be understood as potential resource, as neutral and alien material which the master *cogito* will manipulate at its will. It is, therefore, not as if the human colonizers are cold and careless about the fate of other beings. It is rather the case that they have been ‘en-framed’ into understanding the world as standing-reserve for their purposes. Seen in this light, the *Avatar* predicament changes. The free colonizers, so free that they can even impose their authority on others, are but virtual slaves of the essence of technology. They are slaves just like the protagonists involved in the oil leak, as discussed in section III.

But it does not stop there. The *Avatar* predicament reveals the relationship between the essence of technology and capitalism. The relationship can be discovered by asking the following question: what is that ‘something’ which would be obtained by reducing the indigenous sacred lands to a standing-reserve? The answer is: surplus-profit. The reason why the colonizers are pushed into the planet of the indigenous people is because of the logic of capitalism. Because they will be able to obtain something which, in the nature of the dynamics of such economic system, will render large returns for the colonizers. The value of the material to be extracted is precisely the value set by the market mechanisms of the essence of capitalism. That is to say, for humans the real value of the indigenous sacred lands is only the value that the market sets; there is no real value in the lands themselves. How is the market-value determined? The value is determined precisely by supply and demand, by how much those lands and the material in them will be able to be used as a resource, as *Bestand*, and against the quantity available.

Thus, what pushes the human colonizers to another planet is not the essence of technology as just an ‘en-framing’ philosophical monster, but rather a monster that has its roots in the material relations of their civilization. This correlation between the essence of technology and the essence of capitalism has been pointed out by Michael Eldred:

The set-up [essence of technology] gathers the circular movements of everything that can be ordered to set up, which everything becomes in the age of technology. The totality of beings has then become the standing reserve on stand-by. The language of the set-up reveals similarities to that of capital which suggest that certain figures of thought in Heidegger commingle with Marxian figures by virtue of having related phenomena before the mind's eye.

According to Marx, the essence of capital is the endless, limitless valorization of value, an essence which sets itself up ‘behind the backs’ of people, as Marx often puts it (e.g. Gr.:136, 156). Setting-up and valorization are the respective essential actions of the respective essences, whereby action here cannot be thought in terms of human action, but as an historical destiny that prevails over and overwhelms everything by disclosing the totality of beings to human understanding within a specific epochal cast.<sup>38</sup>

This can be understood even better in a hypothetical scenario. Imagine there was a new breakthrough on Earth which allowed capitalist dynamics to operate without the use of the indigenous population’s natural endowments, dropping the market value of such entity to zero. Would they still invade the country to take their lands? Most likely they would not. There is even the possibility that humans allow the aborigine’s lands to be left alone in complete independence. This runs in contradiction to the essence of technology, to the totalitarian *Bestand*, since it opens the possibility for the aborigines to relate to the environment in their own authentic way. Why could this be allowed to happen in the midst of a technologically-dominated era? Because there is no possibility of obtaining surplus-value, profit, from their lands. Thus, their lands are allowed to be encountered even in an antagonistic form to the essence of technology. That is, authentically as being-in-the-world and standing-forth, for example. Thus, the essence of technology is in the modern era rooted in the dynamics of the essence of capitalism. It is capitalism that pushed it to the most extreme circumstances and transformed it into a monster which is, because of the nature of private property, uncontrollable.

This holds true when applied to the unfolding dynamics of the oil leak. The analysis of section III did not go far enough. The oil leak was indeed characterized by the background operation of the essence of technology, but beneath that was the essence of capitalism. And this relationship must now be revealed.

In June 2010, U.S. Representative Joseph Barton gathered world-wide attention for its apology to BP for a “20 billion shakedown.”<sup>39</sup> Mr. Barton said he was “ashamed” that the government could force a private corporation into creating a \$20 billion reparation fund.<sup>40</sup> More than being simply a political move, since Mr. Barton receives campaign funds from oil corporations, there is a philosophical background operating behind it all.<sup>41</sup> It consists in the way the dynamics of capitalism correlate with the ‘en-framing’ operation of the essence of technology. Mr. Barton is pushed into understanding the world based on the way the monetary contributors dictate. He is pushed by capitalism to understand the world in a very specific way.

If private corporations think it is outrageous to care about the safety of their workers, then Mr. Barton will be coerced into thinking the same, since his way of life depends on their contributions. He will thus have no real option in the way he encounters or relates to other beings. His options are nonexistent. Does Mr. Barton actually care about workers and the ecosystem? Well, this is beside the point, which is precisely my argument. It does not matter

---

<sup>38</sup> Michael Eldred.

<sup>39</sup> Josh Voorhees, “Texas Lawmaker Apologizes to BP CEO for ‘\$20 Billion Shakedown,’” *The New York Times*, last modified June 17, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2010/06/17/17greenwire-texas-lawmaker-apologizes-to-bp-ceo-for-20-bil-57728.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Hamburger and Kim Geiger, “Rep. Joe Barton and Oil Industry Have Long History,” *Los Angeles Times*, last modified June 18, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jun/18/nation/la-na-oil-barton-20100619>.

what he thinks because what will become concrete at the end is what he is pushed to do by the essence of capitalism. As Slavoj Žižek points out with regards to believing, in our deepest self we typically lie.<sup>42</sup> What matters is what ultimately becomes materialized. In this case, what is concrete is his alliance with private interests that push one and only one way of encountering beings: that which generates the most profit. Thus, it becomes easy to see how the ‘en-framing’ capacity, the ability of postulating only one particular world-view, is inherently pushed by the economic interests rooted in surplus-value.

In a similar situation, the use of dispersants also has an economic dimension. Hugh Kafman, a senior political analyst, has argued that the dispersants are an attempt by BP to save money by maintaining the oil undersea, thus making it look as if it was smaller than it is. This in turn helps BP save money because it will be fined less.<sup>43</sup> We can observe the connection between the essence of technology and capitalism. As stated above, BP has been using the sea as a resource to hide its disaster, killing marine life and destroying the fauna. But we can now go further. BP’s position is pushed not by the essence of technology as just an ontological reality, but by the material relations derived from capitalism. Because BP’s essence is rooted in producing surplus-value, it will use the ocean as *Bestand* for achieving its purpose without thinking twice about it—thus, saving money.

What about those parties that do care about ocean life and workers, such as environmental organizations? Why are those groups able to achieve a better relation to technology than others? They are able to precisely because they are not so fundamentally tied by the constraints of capitalism. While the government, BP, and affected private companies push for a way of encountering beings that generates surplus-value, non-profit organizations are not as constrained. They are not built for surplus-value. But do not be deceived. Even individuals or groups that are not as constrained by the relations of capitalism must sell themselves to these relations when they want their point to be heard. That is, even though they are not as constrained, the economic system in which they live is still a capitalist one. An example might shed light into this:

The ocean drives climate and weather, shapes the character of the planet. We do know now that the ocean, where 97 percent of earth’s water is, is vital, not just to the dolphins, the whales, the coral reefs, the kelp forests; it’s our life support system, too. We are sea creatures as much as any of the other creatures who actually live in the ocean, because without the ocean, our lives would not be possible. Anything we care about—our economies, our health, our security, life itself—depends on the fact that this is a blue planet. The ocean is the key to our survival.<sup>44</sup>

This statement is a perfect specimen of the essence of technology in operation as well as its relationship with modern capitalism. The author of the above statement was Sylvia Earle, an oceanographer affiliated from National Geographic Explorer speaking at the United Nations Oceans Day. It is under these conditions that one should expect a more benign and freer

---

<sup>42</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Why Only an Atheist Can Believe Part 8,” *The European Graduate School: Graduate and Post Graduate Studies*, last modified November 10, 2006, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/videos/why-only-an-atheist-can-believe/>.

<sup>43</sup> “EPA Whistleblower Accuses Agency of Covering Up Effects of Dispersant in BP Oil Spill Cleanup,” *Democracy Now!*, last modified July 20, 2010, [http://www.democracynow.org/2010/7/20/epa\\_whistleblower\\_accuses\\_agency\\_of\\_covering](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/7/20/epa_whistleblower_accuses_agency_of_covering).

<sup>44</sup> “Headlines for June 09, 2010,” *Democracy Now!*, last modified June 9, 2010, <http://www.democracynow.org/2010/6/9/headlines>.

relationship with the essence of technology. Her first comments appear to support that thesis as she even mentions how humans are interrelated to other beings in the world.

However, the crucial point comes right after that. She concludes her argument by stating that we should care about the environment because it supports our way of life, our economies, and all we care about. This argument is no different than the U.S. government's statements from above. That is, we care about the environment because we use it as a resource for our intentions (economic prosperity). What began as a different way of attempting to relate to the world ended up in the same way. But, how could it not? She must appeal to nation-states and private parties to quickly stop the leak. And, as we have seen, they only speak the language of techno-capitalism. Hence, she was ultimately forced to shape herself into the techno-capitalist way. No questions asked.

This is the predicament of the aftermath of the oil leak. It is not just the essence of technology, *Gestell*, 'en-framing' the parties involved in the spill as we saw in section III, but the whole material way of manipulating the world that pushes for a total penetration of the essence of techno-capitalism.

### **Being and . . . *ad Nauseam!***

Heidegger's failure to notice the relevance of political economy and the dynamics of capitalism blinded him from understanding that the human being is not only bombarded by the essence of technology. It is also bombarded ontically in every economic relation by the essence of capitalism. Humans thus experience *ad nauseam*. That is, an everlasting repetition of the 'en-framing' nature of the techno-capitalist essence. Every economic activity only serves to reinforce the totalitarian world-view of such a monster that dwells in the material (ontic) and ontological roots of modern civilization.

Is *Dasein* lost? Is it condemned to live under totalitarianism *ad infinitum*? A last look at *Avatar* is helpful. The film culminates with the total defeat of the aborigines, who must run away deep into the jungle. Nonetheless, the deserter human mercenary decides that it is not worth living in his corrupt society, undergoing a morphological change into a fully and permanent aborigine individual.<sup>45</sup>

What does *Avatar*'s closing tell us about how to fight the essence of techno-capitalism? It tells us precisely the way we should *not* do it. The film's end repeats the exact same mistake Heidegger committed in 1934. The mistake is that of withdrawing from the ontic back into the ontological. The deserter human mercenary felt a total defeat against the all-too-might essence of techno-capitalism. He decided not to fight but to withdraw into the ontological, in the form of undergoing a full ontological transformation into an aborigine. Slavoj Žižek provides an insight into this:

The hero is caught between our ordinary reality and an imagined universe . . . the digitally enhanced everyday reality of the planet in *Avatar*. What one should thus bear in mind is that, although *Avatar's* narrative is supposed to take place in one and the same 'real' reality, we are dealing—at the level of the underlying symbolic economy—with two realities: the ordinary world of imperialist colonialism on the one hand, and a fantasy world, populated by aborigines who live in an incestuous link with nature, on the other. . . the end of the film should be read as the hero fully migrating from reality into the fantasy world. This does not mean, however, that we should reject *Avatar* on behalf of a

---

<sup>45</sup> *Avatar*, Directed by James Cameron.

more "authentic" acceptance of the real world. If we subtract fantasy from reality, then reality itself loses its consistency and disintegrates. To choose between "either accepting reality or choosing fantasy" is wrong: if we really want to change or escape our social reality, the first thing to do is change our fantasies that make us fit this reality.<sup>46</sup>

In other words, the deserter mercenary migrated from reality, from the ontic world of totalitarian techno-capitalism, into the fantasy, or what his ideal world would have been if he would not have been defeated. This is a mistake. He should not have to choose between a corrupt reality and a fantasy. He should have materialized his fantasy. He should have eliminated whatever allowed him to normally cope with the corrupt reality. This would have forced him to fight so as to change reality again and again. In Samuel Becket's words, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."<sup>47</sup>

Heidegger fell into *Avatar's* mistake. After becoming disillusioned with German National Socialism he retreated into his own fantasy, the ontological. He abandoned any ontic fight which could help *Dasein* escape from the traps of the essence of technology. His reason for this abandoning was the fact that German National Socialism had failed to realize the "inner truth and greatness" of its ontological possibilities.<sup>48</sup> The problem with this is, again, Heidegger's reluctance to avoid the ontic, to retreat to ontological philosophy. What he should have done instead is to go ruthlessly after the ontic roots of the horrors of the movement: its reliance on capitalism, its race ideology, its systematic killings, its totalitarianism, and so on.

In other words, Heidegger should have looked at the ontic ramifications of the movement that, in turn, closed the possibilities of the ontological horizon of German National Socialism from ever having an 'inner truth and greatness.' It is not enough that Heidegger complained about Nazism's embrace of race ideology; he should have understood that such ontic choice closes the possibilities of its 'inner greatness' from ever existing. That is, it is not a matter of applying Nazism's principles correctly. Its principles and practices are equally abhorrent and as such the possibility of an ontological 'inner greatness' has never been a real option.

Heidegger might have had a point in thinking that "poetically men dwells," that poetry and the arts could serve to break through the totalitarian understanding of being as just standing-reserve.<sup>49 50</sup> That the arts could serve to produce thinking that challenges *Gestell*. But he did not go far enough. What he should have said is that once poetry and art have helped to breakthrough the chains of technology, one has to ruthlessly and mercilessly attack the fundamental economic relations which maintain the essence of technology in its totalitarian position. Only then can you truly challenge the essence of techno-capitalism.

---

<sup>46</sup> Slavoj Zizek, "Return of the Natives," *New Statesman*, last modified March 4, 2010, <http://www.newstatesman.com/film/2010/03/avatar-reality-love-couple-sex>.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Nohow On*, (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 89.

<sup>48</sup> Rudiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good Evil*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 293.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 340.

<sup>50</sup> In his late years Heidegger believed that nothing material could help humans escape from the essence of technology. If the whole of modern society has been 'en-framed' to understand the world as standing-reserve, then neither environmental movements nor scientific discoveries could be a solution since they are already 'en-framed' by technology. The arts, however, allow humans to strip themselves away from their being 'en-framed' by stimulating thinking. This thinking is *not* part of the technological world-view since the arts allow us to challenge the common ideological way of understanding the world, Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 311-341.

## **Recapitulating**

The purpose of this paper was to show how Heidegger's essence of technology was operating behind the unfolding events of the Gulf of Mexico oil leak. The analysis began with a reloading of Heidegger's thoughts regarding the question of being and the essence of technology. It was followed by a philosophical analysis of the three main parties involved in the unfolding of the event: the government, British Petroleum, and the affected parties such as the fishing industry. The investigation revealed that the essence of technology is the philosophical driving force operating in the background of the oil leak, successfully closing the possibilities of relating to beings and the world in other ways.

But this was not all. There is another element which even Heidegger himself missed. That element is none other than the essence of capitalism, the "valorization of value" which provides the essence of technology with a structure from where to operate.<sup>51</sup> The philosophical analysis of the film *Avatar* showed how *Gestell* is intimately related to the dynamics of the capitalist system in its everlasting self-revolutionizing, its market nature, and its resource-driven core. This relationship was shown to be at work in the unfolding dynamics of the oil leak.

I have also hinted at a path to begin to address the essence of techno-capitalism. We must behave like Heidegger in 1933, but avoid his mistakes. We must reinvent our philosophical arsenal so as to fight back with resoluteness and authentic embrace of 'throwness' and historical being, dwelling in poetry and "the task of thinking."<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> Even more, we must not retreat into the pure ontological universe, but rather fight the material roots that incubate the essence of technology. That is, fight within the ontic so as to reinvent the possibilities of the ontological. As Lenin put it, we must "begin from the beginning over and over again," to open a space for the possibility of a free relationship to technology.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Michael Eldred.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 349.

<sup>53</sup> In *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* Heidegger explored the idea that the sciences do not think. What he meant by this is that the sciences usually operate by making use of their already-established fundamental principles. Once in a while they might challenge some of those principles, but the challenge never goes as far so as to throw away the most foundational philosophical principles of the modern sciences. They always operate from an already-established axiom. These axioms Heidegger believed are part of the technological world-view. Since the sciences are here to stay, Heidegger believed philosophy should focus on 'thinking,' on that activity that allows humans to strip themselves away from the ideological day-to-day understanding of the world. This he thinks is crucial for a free relationship with technology, Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 431-449.

<sup>54</sup> Vladimir Lenin, "Notes of a Publicist," *www.marxists.org*, last modified 2002, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/feb/x01.htm>

## Society and Justice for Victims of Sexual Enslavement: A Comparative Look at the *Ianfu* of the Japanese Imperial Army

Catherine Wittkower

*“In many Asian countries where the Confucian mentality still prevails, no concept of human rights exists insofar as lodging claims for redress against perpetrators is concerned. The absence of notions of democracy and human rights in those regions of Asia at that time placed victims without any rights of redress.”*

-Wong Soon Park<sup>1</sup>

In February of 1948, twelve Japanese Imperial Army soldiers were tried and sentenced by the Dutch Government for the kidnapping and forced prostitution of thirty-six Dutch women in Indonesia.<sup>2</sup> On December 6, 1991, three former *ianfu*, or “comfort women”, sued the Japanese government for 20 million *yen*, and made three demands: A formal apology from Japan to the female victims, survivors, and their families; adequate compensation for the female victims and their families from the Japanese government; and for the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to conduct a thorough investigation and to censure Japan for its human rights violations and cover-up of information.<sup>3</sup> Today, it is estimated that between 120,000 and 200,000 women from across East Asia, an estimated eighty-percent being Korean, have not, and most likely never will, receive such justice for their sexual enslavement by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II<sup>4</sup>; the Japanese government refuses to fully accept responsibility sixty-five years after the end of the war.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I will make the case that the situation in which the Korean *ianfu* have found themselves is due to a pervading sense of “shame”, and the Confucian-inspired societal structure, which are uniquely intertwined. It is because of this “shame” that the Japanese government has taken extreme measures to conceal the “comfort women” system, why the Korean and other East Asian *ianfu* remained silent about their sexual enslavement, and why reparations have only recently been sought. I will further argue that, even though the committing of sexual crimes is not condoned in the Confucian societal model, there is no room for justice for female victims of

<sup>1</sup> Won Soon Park, “Japanese Reparations Policies and the “Comfort Women” Question,” in *Positions* (Duke: 1997). pp.122-23.

<sup>2</sup> Yuki Tanaka, “‘Comfort Women’ in the Dutch East Indies,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*. Ed. Bonnie B.H. Oh and Margaret Stetz. East Gate. New York. 2001, 55.

<sup>3</sup> David Andrew Schmidt, *Ianfu: The Comfort Women of the Japanese Imperial Army of the Pacific War, Broken Silence*. Japanese Studies, Volume 10. The Edwin Mellen Press. New York. 2000, 185. *Ianfu* loosely translates to “comfort women/woman” in English from Japanese; Chunghee Sarah Soh. “Prostitutes versus Sex Slaves: The Politics of Representing the “Comfort Women”,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*. Ed. Bonnie B.H. Oh and Margaret Stetz. East Gate. New York. 2001, 80. *Wianbu*, or *Choggun Wianbu* (official), as translated into English, is the Korean word for the “comfort women”, but is not as commonly used in English texts.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Howard, ed. Yang Joo Lee, trans., *True Stories of the Korean Comfort Women. Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and The Research Association on the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan*. Cassell, London. 1993, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Fajar Sodik and Angga Haksoro, “Indonesian Comfort Women Still Get No Support from the Indonesian Government”, trans. Rosmi Julitasari. VHR Media. VHRMedia.com. 19 October 2010. 5 November 2010. [www.vhrmedia.com](http://www.vhrmedia.com).

sex crimes.<sup>6</sup> The women from the Netherlands, with the help of the Dutch Army, seemed to have no qualms with identifying and testifying against their attackers; these women I label as being from a Western “guilt” society, which I will distinguish from a “shame” society.<sup>7</sup> Before I begin, a brief historical overview of the “comfort women” is necessary to understand the severity of the injustice done to these women. Although I am bending my focus toward the “comfort women” from unified Korea, who made up the vast majority of victims, it is recognized that a great number of women from the nations under Japan’s control, including China, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, were enslaved alongside their Korean sisters.

War-time prostitution, forced and voluntary, has its roots in ancient times and continues to occur in both Eastern and Western societies. The Roman army forced female captives into sexual slavery to service the soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Increases in female prostitution, kidnapping, rape, mass rape, and gang rape are also noted to have occurred during, but are not limited to, the Vietnam War and during the war in Bosnia. Neither of these instances, however, were as meticulously organized and documented as the *jūgunianfu* system implemented by the Japanese during the Pacific War (1937-1945).<sup>9</sup> Japan has a long-standing history of state-regulated prostitution, one of the first regulations being the taxation of brothels during the Kamakura Shogunate (1182-1333).<sup>10</sup> Prostitution itself was not taboo in Japan, but to be a prostitute was quite disgraceful; women of the ancient profession were seen as “another race” inferior to other human beings.<sup>11</sup> By the 1900’s, prostitution was a large, thriving industry in Japan.<sup>12</sup> So, it is not surprising that Japan’s prostitute-culture spilled over into the military during the Pacific War.

Korea was the first nation “annexed” into the Japanese Empire in 1910, and became the foothold on the mainland for Japan to attack China in the early part of the 1930’s and begin the Pacific War in 1937. On December 13, 1937, Nanjing, China became the bloody site of what would later be known as the “Rape of Nanjing”, during which hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians and soldiers were massacred and tens of thousands of Chinese women were raped en masse. The Japanese Imperial Army was infamously merciless, both in combat with enemy troops and to their own soldiers during training and active service, but the escalating reports of soldiers raping civilian women and the incident at Nanjing presented the Japanese government with a problem of extreme sexual aggression.<sup>13</sup> Civilian rape by Japanese soldiers created

---

<sup>6</sup> Distinctions in “Western” and “Eastern” only apply post-WWII for the purposes of this paper. “Shame” and “guilt” distinctions have shifted throughout history, depending on social and cultural norms and values, but are applied to the “Eastern” and “Western” distinctions as part of defining their post-WWII status.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike the women from Korea, the Dutch women who were rescued, such as Jan Ruff-O’Herne, came forward immediately and gave accounts of their enslavement. Trial documents from Batavia will not be released until 2025. Tanaka, 56-58.

<sup>8</sup> Some women voluntarily participated in the sexual gratification of soldiers, and were known as “camp followers”. George Hicks. *The Comfort Women: Sex Slaves of the Japanese Imperial Forces*. Allen and Unwin Pty. Ltd. Australia, St. Leonards. 1995, 4-6.

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt, 2. The term *jūgunianfu* is the “official” term for the “comfort women.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. Further restrictions were later implemented, such as the licensing and inspection of brothels, in the 1700’s under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867) and the medical inspection of prostitutes after 1868. Girls under the age of 18 were not allowed to register as a prostitute or work as a prostitute in 1900.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 96. Some women chose to be prostitutes, but a greater number of Japanese prostitutes were the daughters of poor families sold to the brothels. The practice was tolerated, so as to “protect the daughters of good families” from the sexual appetites of men.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>13</sup> The Japanese government’s primary reason for starting the *ianfu* system. Hicks, 6-8.

immense anger within China and other Japanese-occupied nations.<sup>14</sup> To prevent civilian rape and to improve troop morale and esprit de corps, the Japanese government implemented the *jūgunianfu* system alongside the National Manpower Mobilization Act of 1939.<sup>15</sup>

The *ianfu* system was originally meant to provide Japanese prostitutes and Japanese women willing to become prostitutes to soldiers as a means of relieving their sexual urges.<sup>16</sup> Japanese female prostitute recruits were lured by higher compensation and a feeling of patriotism.<sup>17</sup> The Japanese government soon realized that these recruits alone could not satisfy the demand, so recruiters began to prey on women from a Korean mining community in northern Japan, and eventually women from the Korean peninsula and occupied China.<sup>18</sup> Girls as young as 12 and women as old as 35 were recruited by local police, soldiers, and private parties hired by the Japanese military, often under the false pretense that they would be working for the Women's Voluntary Service Corps in factories or performing chores in army camps, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, and would be making substantial wages they could send home to support their families.<sup>19</sup> Some girls and women were kidnapped from their homes, on their way home from work, or from school; some were sold by their families or foster family-employers. Many women were raped by their recruiters or by kidnappers before they were turned over to the army; some women were raped by army doctors during their first inspection before service.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of the Dutch women forced into service in Indonesia, many were kidnapped, others were told they were to be employed as bar maids, or be given jobs in restaurants so they could live outside the camps the Japanese had separated the population into.<sup>21</sup> Instead, the women were made sex slaves in officer's clubs and brothels that serviced Japanese soldiers. By the end of the war, it is estimated that the Japanese Imperial Army was able to acquire between 120,000 and 200,000 women for its "comfort system".

Once the women were brought to the army camps, they were assigned rooms in a house or tents, known as a "comfort station", or *ianjo*, and were inspected by a physician for virginity, venereal disease, defect, and pregnancy. Once their status was determined, the women were put to work "servicing" anywhere from five to over forty soldiers per day. Soldiers visiting the women were given condoms, but many refused to wear them. Most enlisted men were given a half an hour with a "comfort woman", while officers were allowed an hour or even an entire night.<sup>22</sup> Enlisted men and officers alike had to pay to visit the *ianjo* to cover the expenses that came with operating them.<sup>23</sup> These women were not treated as human beings, but as commodities; they were even documented on the military supply lists, next to ammunitions and food.<sup>24</sup> Japanese soldiers often referred to the women as "P", slang for vagina, as *p-mai*, which

<sup>14</sup> Schmidt, 86.

<sup>15</sup> The National Manpower Mobilization Act of 1939 forced Korea to provide material and human resources to the Japanese war effort in China and throughout East Asia. Men were drafted into the military or factories, women were drafted to work in factories or hospitals, but were unofficially drafted as military prostitutes.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>17</sup> Korean women were also preferred to Japanese prostitutes for soldiers by Japanese medical personnel, because the Koreans did not have venereal diseases (due to their chastity culture). Hicks, 8-12, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>20</sup> Hicks, 19-38, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Tanaka, 49-52.

<sup>22</sup> Howard, 32-192.

<sup>23</sup> An *ianjo* is a "comfort station", be it a house, tent, shack, or other facility. Hicks, 62-64.

<sup>24</sup> "...without records of their personal identities." Soh, 75.

is Chinese for “commodity” or “article” or “object”, or as *kyodo banjo*, meaning “public toilet.”<sup>25</sup>

The women were given varying stipends, depending on how much they “earned” from the soldiers, to buy basic necessities and then whatever they could afford to save or spend over that sum.<sup>26</sup> On their days off, most of them cooked, did laundry, cleaned, played cards, drank or were sometimes allowed to go off-base with a soldier to buy supplementary food, cosmetics, clothing, or entertainment.<sup>27</sup> The *inafu* were generally given one day off per week, one day off per month for medical inspection (some women were inspected weekly), and sometimes were given a few days off for menstruation or if they were unable to perform due to injury from a violent soldier.<sup>28</sup> If during an inspection a woman was found to have a venereal disease, she was given a shot of “Injection 606” and a few days rest in either an army hospital or in a separate room in the comfort station.<sup>29</sup> If a woman was found to be pregnant, she was forced to undergo chemical or surgical abortion, or in some cases killed.<sup>30</sup>

Some women escaped by making friends with officers or enlisted men who smuggled them out, some were rescued, some were able to run away, some were simply sent home if they could not service men or if they were not needed, some were released after the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>31</sup> Others never escaped; some were killed during service, some committed suicide, some were hidden away in mental institutions,<sup>32</sup> some died on ships going home that were torpedoed by enemy submarines, and many were executed when Japan lost the war.<sup>33</sup> Those who survived generally did not ever see any of the money they had saved from their time in the “comfort stations.”<sup>34</sup> Most women who have come forward testify that they were not able to marry, keep steady work due to permanent injury and disability, have normal sex lives, or conceive children due to the months, sometimes years of physical and mental trauma.<sup>35</sup>

Much of the information about the *ianfu* was not known until the 1980’s, when former “comfort women” began to come forward and share their experiences that forty years of “shame” had kept in the dark. Though it was common knowledge that the *ianfu* existed, the extent of the abuses and the number of victims was unknown until recently, after much investigation of documents, officials, and testimony from former *ianfu* themselves.<sup>36 37</sup> In December of 1991

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 71-79.

<sup>26</sup> Hicks, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 49-52.

<sup>28</sup> Generally, this was the case, but policies for time off were not consistent from one comfort station to the next. Privileges, frequency and quality of medical inspection and treatment, and time for rest varies, based on supplies available, location, and officer or station-operator discretion. Korean survivors give varying testimony. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>29</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Ibid., 2-192.

<sup>30</sup> “Urgent Matters: Redress for Surviving “Comfort Women”,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*. Ed. Bonnie B.H. Oh and Margaret Stetz. East Gate. New York. 2001, 132-34. Testimony from Kim Yoon-shim. Hahm, Dongwoo Lee.

<sup>31</sup> Soh, .82. Hicks, 53,76,87,112-27,189-93.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Hicks, 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. reports declassified in 1973 documented *ianfu* , from August-September 1944. “The records, declassified in 1973, confirmed that the Japanese Imperial Army handled the transportation, medical treatment, and fee-setting for the *ianfu*.” Documents turned over by Grant Goodman and Yoshimi Yoshiaki were also pivotal pieces of evidence

three former “comfort women”, Kim Hak Soon and two anonymous women, filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government for damages and gained international attention.<sup>38</sup> In 1992, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights heard testimony on the “comfort women.”<sup>39</sup> An anonymous information hotline was set up to collect testimony and survey information about comfort women; along with information from investigations, it is estimated that eighty-percent of the victims were Korean, the remaining twenty-percent being comprised mostly of Chinese women, but also Filipino, Thai, Indonesian, Japanese, and a few Caucasian and Russian women.<sup>40</sup>

Many women began to come forward because they felt safe in anonymity or because their husbands, friends, or family had already passed on without knowing their secret. A few say that they were encouraged to speak out after they were finally able to tell their children or their husbands, some were empowered by the bravery of others’ testimony — others no longer had anything to lose by coming forward.<sup>41</sup> The roles and expectations for women have shifted since these women were enslaved; it has become less stigmatizing to come out as the victim of a sex crime in many parts of the world where formerly it was not, like Korea. There are now memorials, movements, activist groups, and respect for the former *ianfu*, with their home nations taking up their cause for seeking damages from Japan.

After the Bosnian war, in which rape was used as a weapon of war, the term “war rape” was developed and legally made a war crime.<sup>42</sup> The Muslim women who were raped during the Bosnian war were and continue to be vocal about the crimes committed against them.<sup>43</sup> Dutch women forced into prostitution under the *ianfu* system did not remain silent either, unlike many of the Korean victims who testified that they did not fight back.<sup>44</sup> The Dutch women refused to provide sexual services to the Japanese and even committed acts of violence against soldiers whom they were supposed to service.<sup>45</sup> After the war, the Dutch military investigated the “comfort stations” and the claims of the Dutch women who were attacked. In February of 1947, twelve members of the Japanese Imperial Army were brought before the War Crimes Tribunal by Dutch forces in Batavia, where the women testified against the Japanese soldiers who

---

linking the Japanese Imperial Army and the Diet to institutionalized sexual enslavement during the Pacific War. Schmidt, 29-31.

<sup>37</sup> Goodman, Gant K. “My Own Gaiatsu: A Document from 1945 Provides Proof,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*. Ed. Bonnie B.H. Oh and Margaret Stetz. East Gate. New York. 2001, 142-151.

<sup>38</sup> Hicks, 148-49.

<sup>39</sup> Soh, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Other than in Korea, the Japanese tended to occupy “comfort stations” with local women, as well as Korean women. Hicks, xvi-xx, 19-38, 69-111.

<sup>41</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>42</sup> During the Bosnian War, Serbian soldiers used rape to intimidate, humiliate, and impregnate Muslim women in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Though rape was once considered a crime of “honor” by the International Criminal Court, the court “broke precedent” in the case of the Serbians on trial and charged them with rape as “a crime against humanity” and an act of “violence” in 1996.

Stetz, Margaret C. “Wartime Sexual Violence Against Women: A Feminist Response,” in *Legacies of the Comfort Women of World War II*. Ed. Bonnie B.H. Oh and Margaret Stetz. East Gate. New York. 2001. In response, the UN passed a resolution that made rape a “war crime” in 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Stetz, 95.

<sup>44</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>45</sup> “As these girls did not turn up even half an hour later...the police brought out the girls, who were crying frantically, and dragged them out to the gate.” Jan Raff-O’Herne says: “I told the Jap that he could kill me, that I was not afraid to die and that I would not give myself to him...I kicked him, scratched him,”. Tanaka, 42-43, 48-58.

kidnapped and raped them. One officer committed suicide, one was sentenced to death, two were found not guilty, and the rest were given prison time, including the director of the Cadet School and head of the “comfort stations” where the Dutch women were held, Lieutenant General Nozaki Seiji.<sup>46</sup>

Despite recent feminist movements in East Asia, the motivation to remain silent among the Korean “comfort women” runs deeper, and the root of it is in societies that stigmatize female victims of sex crimes. The Muslim Bosniaks and Dutch women, who were from European (or Western) societies, were willing to come forward about the sex crimes committed against them, but the Korean (or Eastern) women were unable to do so for almost a half a century. To be clear, it was, and still is common, among both Eastern and Western societies for women to not come forward to authorities with accusations of rape or sexual assault. However, in Western societies, women know they have the option to come forward and present accusations against a person or persons that violated them, and either choose to or choose not to. For many Eastern societies, specifically Korean women before the 1980’s in this case, women did not see themselves as having the option of seeking justice for being attacked, even though the law provided for it, due to social consequences.

A common thread among the testimony from Korean victims, and not among the testimony of the Dutch victims, was that they felt a great sense of “shame”, or were “ashamed” of what happened to them.<sup>47</sup> Victims wore face-obscuring veils and used pseudonyms instead of their real names to testify against the Japanese during the 1992 hearings.<sup>48</sup> The Dutch victims did not feel “ashamed”, but did feel that they were the victims of Japanese soldiers, who were found “guilty” of sex crimes against them. To delineate the fine line between sentiments of “guilt” and sentiments of “shame”, I will use the standardized English distinction. I argue that the reason the Korean women were unable to come forward until now, in the way that the Bosnian Muslim and Dutch women were, was because they were from (what I will refer to as) a “shame society”. “Shame”, as it is defined by the Merriam-Webster English Dictionary, is “noun; 1 a: a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety. 2 a: a condition of humiliating disgrace and disrepute.” A “shame society” is one in which its citizens, when confronting a wrong between parties, places responsibility for the wrong happening on all parties involved. For example, if a person’s home is burgled, some punishment is lifted or bestowed on the burglar based on whether or not the person burgled locked their door, installed a security system, etcetera. A shame society, by placing blame and additional consequences on the victim of a sex crime, in essence take away “coming forward” as an option to the victim; the former Korean *ianfu* are such victims of a shame society.

“Guilt”, as it is defined by the Merriam-Webster English Dictionary, is “noun; 1: the fact of having committed a breach of conduct especially violating law and involving a penalty. 2 a: the state of someone who has committed an offense, especially consciously. 3: a feeling of culpability for offenses.” A “guilt society”, then, is one in which its citizens, when confronting a wrong between parties, places responsibility on one determined party (or one group of parties), alleviating the other of responsibility. Although some Dutch or Muslim Bosniaks did not seek justice, those who did recognized that “coming forward” was an option, and they could choose whether or not to take it.

<sup>46</sup> Tanaka, 53-58. Bonnie Doyle, “Japan’s ‘Comfort Women’: The Lies Continue”, *Korean Monitor*. Koreanmonitor.net. 22 June 2007. 5 November 2010. [www.koreamonitor.net](http://www.koreamonitor.net).

<sup>47</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>48</sup> “Kaneda Kimiko” was the first to testify in June 1992. Hicks, 158-63.

In the case of sexual crimes, particularly the case of the *ianfu*, a “shame society” ascribes blame to both the victim and the perpetrator. At the time, if a woman was raped in the Republic of China, it was not shameful for her to kill herself, and her aggressor would receive seven years imprisonment; he would only receive five if she lived.<sup>49</sup> The Korean women felt that they could not seek justice against the Japanese because they too felt a sense of blame, as well as a fear of repercussion. Some women felt ashamed because they had taken the bait of the recruiters against their family’s wishes, and felt their rebellion made them partially responsible.<sup>50</sup> If young women came out as former *ianfu*, they would not be able to find husbands, as virginity was practically a prerequisite for the Korean bride.<sup>51</sup> Even elderly women, according to Kim Suk-Woo, were too “ashamed to report” when the Korean government began their inquiry into how many victims remained alive; their total response only included seventy-nine living former *ianfu* in 1992.<sup>52</sup> Mun P’ilgi says that when she was released from three years of slavery, “I couldn’t bear the thought of becoming someone’s wife, not with my past as a comfort woman to haunt me... I couldn’t tell my mother what I had been doing.”<sup>53</sup>

Women who attempted to marry and have children found out they were barren, and left their husbands so the men might marry other women, rather than tell them why they were unable to conceive.<sup>54</sup> Kim Hak Soon was able to marry and conceive a son, and her husband was aware of her past; however, he would beat her and call her “dirty” for having been an *ianfu*.<sup>55</sup> She did not testify until her son was grown and her husband was dead. Many women were disabled from beatings and disease, and were not fit for marriage or to return to their families without disgracing them; it would shame a Korean household if one of the daughters was known to have been impure, consensual or not.<sup>56</sup> Hwang Kūmju, an injured survivor who spent years taking penicillin treatments for venereal disease, laments “I wonder how I can live the rest of my life without continually being looked down upon... I left home thinking I was doing my duty as a faithful child. But that action ruined my life.”<sup>57</sup>

The perpetrators carry just as much shame as the victims in the case of the Japanese government and the manner in which the Japanese government has handled the *ianfu*; it is exemplary of an act of shame. The Japanese government, in the face of “overwhelming evidence” has admitted that it played a role in the establishment of the “comfort system”, but

---

<sup>49</sup> Though not applicable in Korea, I include this detail to emphasize the concept of “shame” that is apparent in most East Asian societies that have a Confucian culture. Schmidt, 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>51</sup> Schmidt, 16. Howard, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Schmidt, 47.

<sup>53</sup> In her testimony, entitled “I So Much Wanted to Study”, Mun P’ilgi accounts for her experiences as a “comfort woman”. She was just eighteen years old in 1944 when she was kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Howard, 80-87.

<sup>54</sup> Many women were not able to have children because of several factors: trauma to reproductive organs from venereal diseases, intercourse, and abortion, and “Injection 606”. Ibid., 32-192.

<sup>55</sup> In her testimony, entitled “Bitter Memories I Loathe to Recall”, Kim Hak Soon (Kim Haksun) accounts for her life before, during, and after her enslavement. After completing “entertainment school”, she crossed into China and was captured by the Japanese army. She was forced into prostitution in 1941 at 17 years old. Ibid., 33-40.

<sup>56</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Ibid., 32-192.

<sup>57</sup> Hwang Kūmju, in her testimony entitled “I Want to Live without Being Treated with Contempt”, talks about her enslavement and how her injuries and illnesses from rape physically affected her the rest of her life. She joined the Volunteer Corps in 1941, when she was 20, to pay off her debt. Instead of being taken to a factory or a hospital, she was sent to an army camp and forced to become a “comfort woman”. Ibid., 70-79.

denies responsibility for it;<sup>58</sup> to this day, the demands of the suit have yet to be adequately met.<sup>59</sup> Until the 1990's, the Japanese Government had placed the *ianfu* in a corner as a known but controversial item not to be discussed in order to “save face” or “*tatema*”.<sup>60</sup> At the end of the Pacific War, Japan took extreme measures to cover up government involvement in the *ianfu* system, including the destruction of documentation, duty reassignment, and murder.<sup>61</sup> According to Nogi Takayuki, “everything, including our personal files, was to be destroyed with the exception of some accounting records. It took three days”.<sup>62</sup> Japanese history textbooks, for the longest time, did not mention the *ianfu* at all, but when the Education Ministry did begin to note the “comfort women”, they were referred to as “volunteers” and “military prostitutes”, not “sex slaves” or “victims.”<sup>63</sup>

The 1965 Basic Treaty between Japan and South Korea, concerning war-time compensation, excluded the *ianfu* entirely.<sup>64</sup> On May 30, 1990, an official inquiry into the *jūgunianfu* was requested by a member of the Upper House of the Diet, but the government would not look into it further on the basis that private citizen groups were responsible for the recruiting and pimping of the *jūgunianfu*.<sup>65</sup> Most former “comfort women” were shamed into silence, but after Kim Hak Soon and two other plaintiffs filed suit against the Japanese Government, documentation began to appear and women came out. After the Tokyo Suit was filed in December of 1991, documentation of Japan’s system of sexual slavery began to emerge from governments, libraries, former military, and private citizens that proved the Japanese Government’s direction of the *ianjo*. Professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki, upon hearing of the lawsuit, uncovered several incriminating documents from government libraries in Japan.<sup>66</sup> The South Korean Embassy turned up several United States war reports that prove military and government responsibility for the maintenance of “comfort stations”.<sup>67</sup> Many documents discovered by the “Fact-Finding group for Koreans Forcibly Removed From Korea” bore the official seal of the Imperial Japanese Government.<sup>68</sup>

The Japanese Government maintained their stance that private citizens were responsible for establishing the *ianjo*, and that the government had no relationship with those private persons, until 1992. Unable to fight the evidence, the Japanese government admitted that it played an official role establishing and maintaining the *ianjo*. Even though several Prime Ministers, including Miyazawa, have made public apologies, none have been endorsed by the Diet. The Japanese Government has not made an official apology or direct compensation, on the

---

<sup>58</sup> Schmidt, 47-73.

<sup>59</sup> Doyle, Bonnie. *The Korean Monitor*.

<sup>60</sup> In Japanese: *honne/tatema*. Schmidt, 14-15.

<sup>61</sup> “There are documented testimonies of *inafu* being executed in groups or being herded into caves which were then dynamited. Kim Dae Il testified that when an epidemic broke out in the *inafu* stations in Shanghai, infecting a number of Korean *ianfu*, the Japanese set the stations on fire... Testimony of US soldiers who discovered abandoned *ianfu* stations during the final days of the war bear witness to cases of murdered groups of *ianfu*.” Seu Nam Hyun also found many women to have been institutionalized. *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-64.

<sup>64</sup> In reference to reparations for “war-time suffering”. Hicks, 132.

<sup>65</sup> Schmidt, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Hicks, 156-57.

<sup>67</sup> Investigations were conducted by the South Korean Foreign Ministry. Schmidt, 28-30.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

basis that the 1965 Basic Treaty absolves them of such responsibility.<sup>69</sup> Though they established the Asian Women's Fund in 1995 to compensate victims, the donations are from private citizens and not the government, so most victims who may claim the money refuse to do so.<sup>70</sup>

The actions of the Japanese Government in order to maintain *tatemaie* constitute a sense of "shame" for its participation in institutionalized sexual enslavement, leaving the *ianfu* unrecognized as victims. The members of the war-time Diet swept the *ianfu* under the rug; some officials went so far as to deny their existence.<sup>71</sup> Those who were directly responsible for the decisions made during the Pacific War are no longer in power or are deceased, but the current members of government, who do not bear direct responsibility for these crimes against humanity, continue to this day to deny responsibility. Since the current Diet is not "guilty" of the crime of sexual enslavement, they are "ashamed" of the image that has been bestowed on the Japanese Government in light of the Tokyo Lawsuit and the overwhelming evidence of officially approved Pacific War atrocities. The government admits "guilt" to the extent of past involvement, but points to so many others that are to blame as well, including the victims themselves. The government does not seem to consider their actions to be wrong, so much as a kind of necessary, even excusable, aspect of war.

Japan might be the perpetrator of these crimes, but Korea also bears some responsibility and, indeed, shame. For the duration of their identity as a nation of the Japanese Empire, Korea did not hold Japan accountable. The Korean Government was aware of Japan's "recruitment" of women for the purpose of forced prostitution, yet did not do anything to stop it. In the 1965 Basic Treaty, South Korea did not so much as recognize their female victims, much less seek damages against Japan or provide compensation themselves. Rigid social expectations for female chastity sealed the lips of the *ianfu* when they returned home, and no encouragement to come forward materialized until feminist activist groups began to emerge in the 1980's.<sup>72</sup> Despite their past "shame" behavior, Korea, along with other Asian nations, has taken the responsibility of standing behind the women who have come forward. South Korea continues to support their victims and the organizations fighting for the demands of the Tokyo Suit. By moving away from "shame" and on to designating "guilt", South Korea has been able to appreciate the former *ianfu* as courageous martyrs rather than disgraced women.

All of the information I have provided is well and good to exemplify "shame", but it does not explain *where* the "shame" stems from; how has the Eastern "shame society" come about? Why have the victims of sex crimes felt social pressure to stay quiet until now? I argue that the "shame society" in most East Asian nations has its roots in the Confucian societal system. This is not to say that other social and religious institutions do not also perpetuate shame among victims of sex crimes (for instance, Middle-Eastern Islamic nations), but for nations like Korea, China, and Japan, this is the case. Although most might not have considered themselves practicing Confucians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Confucianism is never-the-less echoed in Korean law, social norms, the role of women, and the family. I assert that is because of this sense of "shame" rooted in Confucianism that has made resolving the issue of the "comfort women" a long, drawn-out process that might never end in justice for the victims or perpetrators. Before I proceed, I want to briefly recognize that Confucianism has over 2,000 years of history

<sup>69</sup> Doyle, Bonnie. *The Korean Monitor*.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Former Education Minister Seisuke Okuno claimed that the *ianfu* were "volunteers" not "slaves"; some officials denied their existence entirely. Schmidt, 2, 70-73.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. notes # 85 & 86

and evolution, and only certain aspects of its modern conception are attributable to its founder Master Kong (551- 479 B.C.E) (known in the West as Confucius).<sup>73</sup> Confucianism has evolved according to interpretations by teachers, scholars, and students, as well as cultural influences and the needs of the times. Therefore, I will explore Confucianism as it has influenced Korea and the plight of the *ianfu*, and not any one particular set of teachings or Master Kong himself.

Confucianism may have its roots in ancient China, but its influence was long-lasting and wide-spread among Asian nations, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan in particular; Confucianism was adopted alongside Shinto, Buddhism, and Daoism as a tool of education, societal organization, and as an ethical framework.<sup>74</sup> Confucianism supports the education of men and women (though at different levels), strong family units (principle of *hsiao*, or filial piety), societal interdependence (fraternal submission), adherence to ethical behavior, and authoritarian government hierarchies.<sup>75</sup> As a mostly inclusive, rather than mostly exclusive, societal system, Confucianism allows room for social mobility and encourages hard work and intellectual pursuits, which in turn encourages individuals and family units to strive for success as an improvement for themselves and for the good of society. Even in 20<sup>th</sup> century Asian societies, the Confucian virtues of *ren* (humanness or benevolence), *yi* (uprightness), *zhi* (knowledge), *xin* (integrity), and *li* (propriety) were respected, and “self-cultivation” according to these principles was encouraged.<sup>76</sup> During Korea’s Chosŏn Dynasty (1396-1910) Confucianism of the school of Master Zhu was the official philosophy and religion of Korea. Korea did not fully adopt the ideal of social mobility, but continued to practice slavery and aristocratic exclusivity in government.<sup>77</sup>

Confucianism, despite its many redeeming qualities, is chauvinistic in terms of gender. Until the feminist movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were legally and culturally subordinate to their male counterparts in many aspects. Classically, women have had an “interior”, restricted position in which to “cultivate” themselves in a Confucian society, including Korea. Within her inner realm, her home, a woman has authority, but in the outer world in which her husband participates, she is inferior and out of place, even distrusted; “A wise man builds a city, a wise woman ruins a city,” proclaims *The Book of Odes*.<sup>78</sup> In many Asian

---

<sup>73</sup> Evelyn Nagai Berthrong and John H. Berthrong. *Confucianism: A Short Introduction*. One World Publications, Oxford. 2000, 1-3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-22.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 46, 55-76.

<sup>76</sup> “In the English world, scholars have translated *Ren* by many terms: benevolence, altruism, kindness, charity, compassion, magnanimity, human-heartedness, humanness, humanity, perfect virtue, goodness, and so on.” Chenyang Li, “The Confucian Concept of Ren and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study”, in *Confucian Political Ethics*, ed. Daniel A. Bell. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 2008. p. 177. Berthrong and Berthrong, 89.

<sup>77</sup> Japan adopted Confucianism as the ruling, but not orthodox, ideology during the Tokugawa Shogunate, and it continued to influence the lives of the Japanese then and thereafter. Japan, being a military-oriented society, did not fully accept all the principles of Confucianism and the ideology was not institutionalized for society as a whole. China, being the birthplace of Confucianism, has the longest and most intimate history with the ideology. It wasn’t until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Confucianism began to lightly fade. Even state examinations in China were based on Confucianism until 1905, when the Western influence on China began to change how the nation conducted education. Berthrong and Berthrong, 5, 168-185.

<sup>78</sup> Classically, women have had an “interior”, restricted position in which to “cultivate” themselves in a Confucian society. Even the home she was to “cultivate” herself in was not hers, since property and status are transmitted to and through the male line, as are the wife’s familial loyalty, possessions, and life. These traditions were respected in Korea, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when, during the 1970’s and 80’s, women’s groups demanded revisions to family

societies, men came to be associated with *yang*, the heavenly element and women with *yin*, the earthly element, which reflects the superiority/inferiority complex between the two;<sup>79</sup> “The earth cannot step on heaven, can it?”<sup>80</sup>

As children and adolescents, girls are educated separately from their male counterparts. At this age, girls are subordinate to their parents and brothers. When a girl comes into womanhood and is eligible to marry, she then becomes the subject of her husband and his parents (in some nations, she is subordinate to her husband’s sisters). When she is a mother she is equal in power to her sons, who owe her their utmost respect. Concubines, girls, and single women do not garner the respect that wives and mothers do; a woman’s status in society and in her family is ultimately dependent upon the men to whom she is related.<sup>81</sup> Although a woman is subject to the men in her life she is the head of the household, and is responsible for the finances that are allocated thereto.<sup>82</sup> She is also responsible for the early fundamental education of her children before sending them off to school or hiring a tutor.<sup>83</sup> A woman’s most important role is to become a good mother and wife, and to produce sons who will take care of herself and her husband in their retirement years.<sup>84</sup>

Gender and sexual expectations are the prominent basis for Confucian delineation of roles and norms, as well as age and familial ties. “The assessment of women’s status in any Confucian society is a highly complex issue, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Korea,” asserts Haejoang Cho in her essay *Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea*. In her assessment of the Confucian-inspired societal structure of Korea, she focuses on mapping the female hierarchy; from most powerful to least powerful, at the top are mothers, then wives/sisters, unmarried daughters, and girl-children.<sup>85</sup> Women have little social mobility to become the Confucian ideal, *junzi*, or one who has the virtue of *ren*; the prerequisite of public life (participation in government) traditionally denies them from their

---

laws that would allow them rights independent of their sons, husbands, and fathers, parental rights over children, as well as the right to divorce and remarry.

Howard, 4-5. Sin Yee Chan, “Gender and Relationship Roles in the Analects and the Mencius”, in *Confucian Political Ethics*. Ed. Daniel A. Bell. Princeton University Press, New Jersey. 2008, 154.

<sup>79</sup> In her essay, “The Confucian Concept of Ren and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study”, Chenyang Li notes that it was not Confucius who used “yin” and “yang” to describe men and women, but that “The philosopher most responsible for blending the yin-yang doctrine into Confucianism is Dong Zhongshu (179-04 B.C.E).”, and defends a reconciliation between feminism and Confucianism. However, it is recognized that Confucianism, whether a part of Master Kong’s intent or no, has been historically used by social and governmental systems to oppress and devalue women. Chenyang Li, 188-90. Howard, 4.

<sup>80</sup> “To the question, “Why are men superior to women? Aren’t both the earth and the heaven indispensable?” one woman responded: “The earth cannot step on heaven, can it?” She also explained that chastity was required only of women because the earth cannot have two heavens.”

Haejoang Cho, “Male Dominance and Mother Power: The Two Sides of Confucian Patriarchy in Korea”, in *Confucianism and the Family*. Ed. Walter H. Slote and George A. DeVos. State University of New York Press, New York. 1998, 192.

<sup>81</sup> The article “Male Dominance and Mother Power...”, the balances and inequalities between women and men in Confucian societies are examined based on their familial status. Haejoang, 192-196. Berthrong and Berthrong, 55-74.

<sup>82</sup> “Interior” responsibilities of the ideal Confucian mother. Berthrong and Berthrong, 8-9, 45-69.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Haejoang, 187-208.

birth.<sup>86</sup> For a woman to ultimately fulfill her potential, she must become a good and honorable mother, particularly to sons who may carry on the family name in the patrilineal Korean society. To become a good mother, a woman must marry; to marry, a woman must be chaste, for “the earth cannot have two heavens”.<sup>87</sup> At the epicenter of this female hierarchy and commitment to patriarchy is filial piety, or *hsiao/xiao*. A girl is expected to respect and be loyal to her parents, brothers, and sisters, then as a married woman to her husband and her in-laws. This familial loyalty and implicit submission were the basis for constricting laws for Korean women, such as the inability to initiate divorce and laws against widows being able to remarry, as well as social taboos of sexual relationships before marriage and adolescent rebellion.

I do not see how Confucianism in practice, though it does not in theory condone the committing of sex crimes, lends toward justice to the female victim of a sex crime, namely the *ianfu*; I would say that a Confucian society, with its morals and norms, facilitates victims’ silence and inhibits justice from being served. The 1930’s and 1940’s were not too far removed from the Confucian Chosŏn Dynasty, which only collapsed with the Japanese Annexation in 1910. Social taboos and laws based on Confucian teachings still confined the Korean women of the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to a stringent code of conduct and expectations.<sup>88</sup> The *ianfu* being mostly single, virginal Korean women, had their one bartering chip for a potentially fulfilling marriage and future children forcibly taken away from them: their chastity. By losing their chastity, many lost their shot at marriage. The *ianfu* who could not conceive were exiled to a life of solidarity, with neither the companionship nor support from a husband or child in their old age. Without a child to live with when she could no longer work or care for herself, the former “comfort woman” was resigned to living off of state welfare and cheap housing, to be frowned upon by her neighbors and peers.<sup>89</sup>

Not only does a “comfort woman” lose her potential to achieve the highest positions in the female hierarchy, she cannot meet even the lowest requirement of being an honorable daughter. Some former *ianfu* testified that they joined the Women’s Volunteer Corps against their parent’s wishes, under the impression that they could make money as nurses or factory workers.<sup>90</sup> Most, however, joined after they and their parents were convinced by recruiters, and even their school-teachers that they could be good and honorable daughters by earning more money to help their families. These girls and women thought that they were performing their filial duty to their families by going off to work. Once some found out what was about to happen to them, they killed themselves or attempted escape rather than face shaming themselves, and potentially their families. Those who survived their horrific enslavement in the *ianjo* either returned home or established a life in the country they were enslaved in. Of those that went home, few were able to admit to their families that they had been sex slaves, and some felt so

---

<sup>86</sup> Sin Yee Chan, 152-53.

<sup>87</sup> see [87]

<sup>88</sup> “When the Chosŏn or Yi dynasty (1593-1910) adopted Neo-Confucianism as the state religion of Korea, it became more than a political ideology. It became the moral philosophy...”

Kwang Kyu Lee, “Confucian Tradition in the Contemporary Korean Family”, in *Confucianism and the Family*. Ed. Walter H. Slote and George A. DeVos. State University of New York Press, New York. 1998, 249.

<sup>89</sup> Traditionally, though in decline, the eldest living child is supposed to accept his or her parents into his or her house when the parents can no longer work or care for themselves. The former “comfort women” felt ostracized and ashamed in their own communities. Howard, 32-192.

<sup>90</sup> Taken from the testimony provided by Korean survivors. Howard, 32-192. Hicks, 24-25, 52, 207.

ashamed that they left their families behind of their own volition; those that did speak out were shunned within or even displaced from their households.

In Confucianism, if a woman cannot become a mother, much less a man's wife, and if she is impure and repugnant to her family, then where is her value? Shame and disrepute placed on the *ianfu* during their wasted youth lead to my finding that Confucianism adds insult to injury by placing blame and further punishment on the victim, instead of providing justice, kindness, and understanding for her suffering. The "comfort woman" was not courageous for surviving enslavement, she was not comforted for her sorrows, she was not martyred for her suffering until after the feminist movements of the 1980's. All the while that male-centric Confucianism had standing and the mother-centric hierarchy was socially enforced, she was ashamed, disreputable, and looked down upon. Once the Confucian influence on gender roles and sexual behavior began to lift in present-day Korea, the former *ianfu* were finally able to free their selves from silence and come forward to seek reparations for their decades of pain and solitude.

My stance is that justice cannot be achieved for female victims of sex crimes, specifically the *ianfu*, in a Confucian society, but I do recognize that not only is Confucianism a social map, but an ethical foundation; Confucianism is not entirely blind to the plight of the victim or the actions of the perpetrator. Although Confucianism has historically had a religious component, only its secular components will be considered; that being said, no religion or society has a monopoly on "shame".<sup>91</sup> I will look at and respond to what Confucianism has to say about 1) the conduct of the person who commits the crime and 2) how the victim and the state might be able to deal with the crime and the perpetrator.

Much disrepute and shame falls upon one who commits a sexual crime against another human being. In the *Analects*, it is said that "It is the person that is able to broaden the way, not the way that broadens the person".<sup>92</sup> Confucianism holds the individual responsible for their own behavior, so if someone makes poor or criminal decisions, they hurt or even destroy their chances to achieve their potential. By taking themselves out of the running for becoming *junzi*, the perpetrator of a sex crime not only shames themselves, but their family as well. The criminal who shames his or her family has not adhered to filial piety, and is disreputable. A good Confucian might distress over their actions, for it is not only their selves that they will bring dishonor to, but also to those that they love and those that have brought him or her into this world. Self-cultivation also involves being reputable with peers and with the government, which are respectively derivative of the duties of fraternal submission and filial piety. A criminal is not respected by good and honest members of society, and receives punishment through being shunned for disrepute. A criminal, ideally, should not hold positions in government and should be outcast from society or punished as an immoral human being, should he or she be incorrigible.

So, concerning the first issue of criminal conduct, one who commits a sex crime is made to suffer in the Confucian ethical prescription. This person does not have the virtue of *ren*, and is incapable of being an honorable member of his or her family or government. Those in the

---

<sup>91</sup> This also applies to analyzing the differences between "Eastern" and "Western" societies. Western societies and Eastern societies both have a plethora of religions that do affect how people carry out their daily lives, many of which are chauvinistic in terms of women's issues, like rape and sexual assault. To clarify, a nation with a large Muslim population, like those of the former Yugoslavia, I classify as "Western", since they are "European". Muslim nations, such as Saudi Arabia and Indonesia I classify as "Eastern", due to differing social value systems from "Western" nations with "European" affiliations. Extra-religious societal institutions and norms are what I will consider in my arguments.

<sup>92</sup> Berthrong and Berthrong, 25.

Japanese Government and Japanese Imperial Army who partook in establishing and maintaining the *ianjo* do not deserve to be leaders in the Confucian society, and should have fallen into disrepute by being removed from their positions of power. However, the *ianfu* are punished in a similar manner. They, too, fall into disrepute and shame for having been raped and enslaved. As women, they do not get to represent themselves in the government in the first place, so their interests outside of family affairs go unheard; their cries for reparation are stifled by their submissive positions. As victims, it seems counter-intuitive that they should suffer beyond the crime committed against them, but they are punished as harshly as the perpetrators themselves. Though they did not intentionally stray from the duties of filial piety and fraternal submission, they are treated as such by losing their potential for marriage, motherhood, and honoring their family as a chaste, respectable daughter. Since each man and woman is responsible for their own “way”, Confucianism does indeed place blame on the victim, for their actions led them to become victims, just as the perpetrators’ actions lead them to become criminals; so, it would seem that each in the Confucian eye is deserving of their suffering.

In the *Analects*, it is stated in 2:3 “The Master said, ‘If the people are led by laws and restrained by punishments, they will try to avoid them without any sense of shame. If they are led by virtue and restrained by propriety, they will have a sense of shame and become good.’”. There is much to fear for misbehavior in the Confucian society, even without punishment. If an individual’s behavior was released from inter-dependent honor and he or she was only accountable to their self, the commission of a crime would be far easier on the conscience to commit. Also, if a person thinks committing the crime favorably outweighs the potential bane of punishment, then punishment is not a sufficient deterrent. In the case of the Japanese Government, if they were in an ideal Confucian society, they might not have committed such horrible crimes against humanity; their virtue would have arrested their move to implement the *ianfu* system, and their sense of propriety would have reminded them that their actions had bearing on their status as leaders, their family name, and their nation. It is true that since no one, nationally, was above the Diet that there was no fear of punishment, and if they kept the system under wraps, then there would be no punishment from the international community. The Japanese also felt that the benefits of expanding the empire outweighed the costs (moral or otherwise) of enslaving women. If the Japanese were subject to a strict Confucian ideal, perhaps they might not have implemented the “comfort women” system.

A question for the Confucian comes to mind: if a criminal is one who is not a good Confucian, does not hold himself or herself to virtuous standards, and does not care about how their actions affect their victim, then why should they be expected to care about if they and their family are shamed? The second question to consider is thus: What if the criminal *is* the state? The Japanese government not only showed no remorse for their kidnapping and enslaving over a hundred thousand innocent women, they outright denied, and continue to deny, responsibility for their actions. Not only did they not care about the women they enslaved, they went so far as to consider them sub-human. In Japanese society, prostitutes were treated as a separate race, not women and not human, but more like animals. Japanese soldiers saw the *ianfu* in a similar way, as pathetic receptacles for their sexual satisfaction to be consumed, no better than livestock. Why should one respect or care about the feelings of others if they are not even thought to feel, if they are not even human beings?

If the Japanese state is supposed to be the corrective authority that seeks justice for the victims, then the victims are at a great loss. The Japanese Government, however, does care about how the *ianfu* system reflects on their image and the image of their families and the Japanese

people— so much so that in actions of shame they attempted to bury the evidence, as well as the victims by killing many of them—and often waiting for the rest to die so that they might not have to pay them an apology or reparations. The international community has not punished (for many nations, it is not for lack of trying) Japan for their wrongdoing. The Dutch are, of course, an exception. Since the perpetrators have no sense of virtue or propriety that obliges them to atone for their crimes, punishment and censure from the international community might be the only means of holding Japan accountable. Alas, the “comfort women” are left without even this redress.

Sadly, the Confucian social constraints on women disallow juridical accommodations for female victimhood. Though Confucianism provides deterrents for immoral or illegal behavior, these deterrents break down at the collective level, especially when that collective comprises a powerful state. Shame, which in Confucianism was thought to prevent crime, actually just provides greater incentive for the criminals to cover their tracks and the victims to remain silent. Both the *ianfu* and the Japanese had much to lose because of the “comfort women” system, so each kept quiet to prevent any further damage to their reputations in societies that condone the silence of those who are ashamed. I feel that I have shown Confucianism is, however unintentionally, at the heart of this “shame” society that has fostered a multitude of problems for female victims of sexual enslavement and sexual crimes, including their inability to make their plight known and to seek justice for the crimes that have been committed against them.

As a final note, even if the women had come forward immediately after the end of the Pacific War and were awarded reparations for their suffering, how could they ever be fully compensated? As Jan Ruff-O’Herne, one of the Dutch victims, said: “They had taken away everything from me. My self-esteem, my dignity, my freedom, my possessions, my family,”- even the child in her womb.<sup>93</sup> How do you repay a woman for taking away her ability to have children, to marry, to have a normal sexual relationship, to sleep at night, to be an innocent youth? These things cannot be repaid with money, with the death or imprisonment of the individuals responsible, or with an apology. Perhaps the only justice would be to work toward giving victims a voice, to clear the air of shame and of guilt for the survivor to speak out and for others to listen, so the atrocities of the Japanese might not again be repeated by future generations.

---

<sup>93</sup> Hicks, 34-38.

## Powerism

Daniel Boyd

Why does fire melt ice? Three metaphysical theories that try to give answers to questions like this can be labeled as “Hypotheticalism”, “Powerism”, and “Nomism”. Respectively, these views posit the existence of hypothetical facts, causal properties, or scientific laws as the fundamental entities. Powerism, which can be characterized as a Neo-Aristotelian view, will be defended here.

None of the notions of hypothetical facts, causal properties, or scientific laws are absurd at a glance. Each theory attempts a reduction of the others. For instance, the Powerist would maintain that scientific laws or hypothetical facts can be reduced to causal powers. (where causal powers or properties are the fundamental entities that the Powerist posits in his theory) If powers are more basic, they are said to ground the existence of the other entities put forward in non-powerist theories. I argue in this paper that the Dual Aspect Theory of properties gives the best account and that it can show how truths about counterfactuals and scientific laws can be reduced to truths about powers that inhere in objects.

### What is Dual Aspect Theory?

Dual Aspect Theory can be categorized as a “Strong Powerist” view. “Strong Powerists believe that attributions of power are fundamental.”<sup>1</sup> On this view, counterfactual and law like truth reduces to truth about causal properties of objects. In order to distinguish Dual Aspect Theory from other views that fall under a Powerist heading, some things have to be said about properties.

The first notion that is required to distinguish the view is individuation. We individuate objects by giving their temporal or spatial locations. For properties, the same story cannot be told. They are individuated by their aspects. This notion can be understood by considering color. Color properties are individuated by distinctions such as shade, hue, brightness etc. These are aspects of color properties. Can there be causal aspects of properties? Yes. What do we say of the power of fire? It is a power that melts ice, but it is not a power that freezes water. By, Leibniz law we know that if two properties have different aspects, then they can’t be identical. What is of interest here is a question concerning causal aspects: Must two properties A and B be identical if they have all the same causal aspects? The Dual Aspect Theorists says no. It would certainly be presumptuous to claim that everything had been said about a property after a complete causal description has been given. The Dual Aspect Theory claims that there can be more aspects to properties than their mere causal functions. But that is not all.

If we restrict our inquiry to aspects of causal properties, further questions can be asked. Is a causal property something that is had as a matter of necessity or not? The Dual Aspect Theorist says yes. If the property of being fire has the power to melt ice, then the property of being fire

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Koons, Chapter 5: Conditionals, Laws, and Powers, 2010, 18.

*necessarily* has the power to melt ice. The power to melt ice is something that the property of being fire could not fail to have. This seems like an intuitive view.

Now the theory can be stated precisely. Dual Aspect Theory holds that fundamental properties are properties that have their causal powers necessarily and are not individuated by their causal aspects. From this point forward, I will refer to Dual Aspect Theory as “Powerism” or the “Powerist position.” With the view in hand, we can now go on to argue that hypothetical facts and scientific laws are grounded in the powers of objects that are found in the world.

### **Why Causal Powers can’t be reduced to Hypothetical Facts**

Strong Hypotheticalism is the view that says hypothetical facts are the fundamental entities. Hypotheticalists argue that truths about powers or laws reduce to hypothetical truths. In order to understand this view, we must consider conditional statements.

There are different kinds of conditional statements, but it will only be necessary to consider a couple for our purposes. These are the indicative and the subjunctive. An indicative conditional is a statement of the form “If P, then Q”. A subjunctive conditional is a statement of the form “If P had been the case, then Q would have been the case”. In *Counterfactuals*, David Lewis uses examples from Ernest Adams to make the distinction clear.<sup>2</sup> The first is indicative and the second is subjunctive. (also known as counterfactual)

- (1) If Oswald did not kill Kennedy, then someone else did.
- (2) If Oswald had not killed Kennedy, then someone else would have.

The fact that these statements have different truth conditions entails that they have different meanings. The first statement concerns what is true if Oswald wasn’t Kennedy’s actual murderer. The second concerns what *would* have happened if Oswald *hadn’t* actually murdered Kennedy. The Hypotheticalist has a way of explaining the difference in meaning. He can do this by claiming that there are hypothetical truth makers which account for the difference. We can say that a hypothetical truth maker is a hypothetical fact. Take example (2). Its truth maker would just be the hypothetical fact that, if Oswald had not killed Kennedy, then someone else would have. The fact grounds the truth of the statement. But how does this cause a problem for the Powerist?

The Hypotheticalist wants to claim that the truths about powers of objects are really grounded in hypothetical truths. Another way of saying this is that the Hypotheticalist wants to reduce causal properties to hypothetical facts. Take our fire with the power to melt ice. The Hypotheticalist says that fire having the power to melt ice is grounded in the fact that, if you were to put ice near fire, then the ice would melt. The Hypotheticalist says that if you really think that there *are* powers over and above the hypothetical facts that ground the truth of counterfactual assertions, then you are being misled.

There is an interesting problem that has been cited against the Hypotheticalist. The

---

<sup>2</sup> David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1973), 3.

problem concerns thought experiments introduced by C.B. Martin that involve what are called “finkish” dispositions. These thought experiments have been seen as an obstacle to any view that counts counterfactual truth as fundamental.<sup>3</sup> Let us consider an example that involves a so called finkish disposition.

We can imagine a porcelain vase that turns to steel whenever it is dropped. If someone were to drop this vase, it would not break. The conditional statement, “if you were to drop this vase, then it would break” would be false. If an object’s fragility were reducible to hypothetical facts, then there is *no way* this vase could be fragile. On the Hypotheticalist view, there is no way that someone’s intuition could be right if they took the vase to be fragile. It would *have* to be sturdy. This turns out to be a problem for the Hypotheticalist despite how outlandish the example is. Are we really so certain that a porcelain vase’s fragility would be offset by these strange possibilities? A vase doesn’t have to break in the first place to be fragile. A porcelain vase would be called fragile even if it never broke. There is something to the idea that fragility is intimately related to the chemical structure of the vase itself. (not what *would* happen to the vase if...etc.) Even though the vase’s chemical structure alters when it’s knocked off a shelf, it is still made of porcelain when it lays at rest. Citing “because it’s made of porcelain” seems to be a perfectly good answer to the question “why is this vase fragile?” It doesn’t seem obvious that fragility cares for the counterfactual states of affairs that the Hypotheticalist has in mind. He could say that the vase isn’t fragile (and he would have to), but this seems like a theory laden assertion. It is also hard to dispute the fragility on the basis of there being a change in the material structure of the vase. This is because the example can shift. Suppose this time that rather than turning to steel, a fairy sprinkles magic dust on the outer edge of the vase whenever someone drops it. The counterfactual requirement for fragility will still not be met. If this isn’t good enough, you can imagine that the vase is in a world made entirely of pillows which is inhabited by pillow people. The counterfactual will still not be met. For a minimally absurd example, just imagine that the vase is guarded by soldiers who place pillows on the floor whenever someone drops it.

It seems like a vase can maintain its fragility in these bizarre situations. At the same time, the hypothetical facts that are supposed to count as the basis of the reduction turn out to be false. It would seem that the Hypotheticalist has their work cut out for them if they plan on reducing fragility to hypothetical facts. Before this can be claimed as a victory for Powerism, there are some objections to this criticism of Hypotheticalism that I would like to consider.

We say that these examples are a problem for the Hypotheticalist if someone has the intuition that the vase is fragile. Why would that matter? If we have the intuition that the vase is fragile and the facts that the Hypotheticalist uses to support an object’s fragility are false, then the Hypotheticalist position is not squaring with our intuitions. If our intuitions are based on perceiver independent, non-relational powers of the vase, then the so called hypothetical facts surrounding the vase are not only extraneous to its fragility, but destructive to the Hypotheticalist position. So can we say that our fragility intuitions are tracking inherent dispositions of objects? There are at least two reasons to doubt this.

---

<sup>3</sup> C.B. Martin, “Dispositions and Conditionals,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 174 (January 1994): 1-8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2220143>.

The first is an argument from specie variation. Consider the judgments you would receive about things like vases and bars of steel if you didn't only ask humans. The judgments of a spider (if a spider could make judgments), would probably be that neither vases nor bars of steel are fragile. The judgments of Superman would probably be that both vases and bars of steel are fragile. It seems like the judgments that would be given are relative to the strength of the animal. If there is an objective fact about the fragility of objects, then two of these animals will have to be wrong but they will all seem to have the same justification. If there is a correlation between intuition and justification, then it is unlikely that there is an intuition of a property that is guiding fragility judgments in this case. A Powerist might try to restrict the judgments to a particular species, but that will be irrelevant if similar problems can be generated without considering a variety of animals. The second argument is similar but restricts its scope to humans for this reason.

While it is clear that there can be discrepancies in judgment from one species to another, it is still possible to get variations among members of the same species. Take into consideration two tribes called tribe A and tribe B. Imagine that there is a type of gourd that can be found in the environment of both tribes. The tribes live on opposite ends of a forest where the conditions surrounding the gourds are different. Something about the air or soil in which the Tribe A gourds grow makes them be such that they are smashed if stepped on. Something about the air or soil in which the Tribe B gourds grow makes them be such that they are not smashed if stepped on. We could suppose that tribe A would believe the gourds to be fragile, while tribe B would believe the gourds to be not-fragile. Suppose that one member from each tribe was swapped. What would the tribe A member say now that he was surrounded by tribe B gourds? If he has a reaction that is common to most people when they consider the vase in the finking case, he will say the gourds are *still* fragile. This attitude will be maintained even though the conditional "If the gourd were stepped on, it would break" is false. He could say this is a case where his (supposedly correct) intuition of the gourd can't be grounded in the truth of the conditional; but an inverse account of the same reasoning can be given for the tribe B member who is surrounded by tribe A gourds. He will say the gourd is *still* not fragile. We have a case where all the gourds are finked. So what matters here? There are two things. First, the intuitions of the individuals don't match up with the hypothetical facts. We have already seen this with the original cases. Second, the intuitions of the individuals in the scenario can't be relied on to correctly track inherent properties of the gourds. If their intuitions can't be trusted to track fragility, then why should ours?

If both tribe members stick to their historically conditioned responses, then they will be doing the same thing that someone does when they take the vase to be fragile in the original finking cases. If the justifications of A and B cannot be distinguished, then we cannot be justified in making the assertion that the vase is fragile in the original cases. Even if there is a right answer, there is a low probability that we can be right about the fragility of objects in general. If we increase the number of species, histories, and objects to evaluate, then we will get a wide range of different judgments about the fragility of objects. Only one out of a very large number could be right about all the objects.

So does this really hurt the Powerist? Not any more than it can hurt the Hypotheticalist. Neither our intuitions nor the hypothetical facts surrounding an object can do any consistent

work when it comes to determining fragility. Contradictory intuitions about fragility happen over the same kind of gourd. Contradictory hypothetical statements can be true of instances of the same kind of gourd. Since there is not a uniform intuition or hypothetical statement for each instance of the gourd, the next question we can ask is what is sufficient to explain the variety of judgments.

For an explanation, the Powerist can still refer to causal properties. Not just of the objects evaluated, but also of the species that encounter them, as well as the differences in memory and habit that occur among members of the same species. Even if fragility is thrown out on the basis of being illusory, the Powerist can still refer to fundamental causal properties to give a sufficient account of the judgments. This account would include the properties of the chemicals and organs that compose the objects and animals.

Can the Hypotheticalist do the same thing? If the Powerist gives up on fragility, then the Hypotheticalist doesn't have the burden of reducing it to conditional truth. This is would be great, but he still needs some way of explaining the judgments of fragility. The Hypotheticalist will have to do this with conditional facts in the place of powers. It seems like hypothetical facts are an irreducible notion and powers are just the same, but we can still ask what kind of thing a fact is. We can't blame the Hypotheticalist for having irreducible notions, but we can note that hypothetical facts don't fit in with a simple ontology of objects and properties. Because facts are entities that involve objects and properties, facts are something over and above objects and properties. Causal properties are just like any other properties when we consider what type of entity they are. If the Powerist does not posit facts and we only consider facts, properties, and objects, then the Hypotheticalist will posit more kinds of things among this range of ontological choices. Causal powers could be seen as undesirable extra luggage, but the Hypotheticalist has a bag of a completely different kind.

### **Why Causal Powers can't be Reduced to Scientific Laws**

In this section we will see that Nomism also has a heavy difficulty reducing powers to laws. In contrast, the reduction of laws to powers is incredibly simple. Let's take a minute to flesh out the view so we can see why the Nomist's reduction is so difficult.

Nomism claims that what is fundamental are the laws of nature. On this view, both powers and counterfactual truth can be reduced to truths about the laws of nature. On this view, a law of nature would be that whenever fire and frozen water stand in a certain relation of spatial proximity, the frozen water melts. The desire of the Nomist is for the law to "confer" the power of melting ice on fire. But it's not so simple how the Nomist would actually work this out. Robert C. Koons explains difficulties that are associated with three options that are open for the Nomist. We will examine those here.<sup>4</sup>

A first attempt might try to write the powers into the laws themselves. We could say that the law is "All fire has the power to melt ice". This would be good for the Nomist because he wants it to be the case that the powers of objects can be deduced from the laws themselves.

---

<sup>4</sup> Koons, Chapter 5, 11.

However, there is a problem with this approach. To put it simply, if the laws have this specific form, then it seems like our knowledge of the laws is being informed by our understanding of the powers of the things that the laws describe. If powers are not fundamental, then the laws will have to look different.

For a second attempt, the Nomist could try to write the powers out of the laws. On this view we only have the laws stating that ice will be melted after it encounters fire. This is a solution to the first objection, but there is no longer a clear way of deducing the actual powers from the laws. The conditions for a reduction cannot be met in this way.

For a third attempt, we will consider the Nomist position known as the Dretske-Tooley-Armstrong theory.<sup>5</sup> On this view the powers are not written directly into the laws, so the first objection is prevented. In order to prevent the second objection the view must provide a way of making the deduction (and hence reduction) go through. It does this by introducing a special relation that is called “nomic necessitation”. This is a relation that is supposed to hold between two properties. For example, there is a relation of nomic necessitation that holds between the property of being fire in a specified spatial proximity to ice and the property of being melted ice.

The main problem for this account is that there is a divergence between the nomic relation and the universal generalization, “all fire has the power to melt ice”. The nomic relation is not something that holds between instances of fiery things, but a relation that holds between properties. To bridge the gap between the properties and the instances, the Nomist must posit a brute necessity between the law and the universal generalization if the reduction is to go through. Even if the Nomist does this, there are more problems.

Here is the dilemma. Is the relation of nomic necessitation an internal relation or an external relation? The Nomist had better not take the first option. If he does then the relation might be necessary, but his position will look a lot like a Powerist account. If the relation of nomic necessitation between the property of being fire and the property of being melted ice is founded upon the properties that fire has, then we are back to square one with something like the first objection. If the law like relation is based on the intrinsic properties of the things involved, then why not just go ahead and say that the law is based on the properties? The Nomist can claim that the relation is external, but if he does there is another question to ask. Is the relation necessary or contingent? On either option we have no explanation of why. Does the Powerist fare any better?

Yes. The laws on the Powerist view are simply descriptions of the powers that things have. That *all fire melts ice* is a law follows from the power that fire has to melt ice. This is simple, and we need not posit any metaphysical necessities to make the reduction go through.

---

<sup>5</sup> John W. Carroll, "Laws of Nature", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/laws-of-nature/>>.

### Summation

We have seen that there are problems with Nomism, and Hypotheticalism. Neither of these views has decisive arguments against the Powerist position, and we have witnessed problems with both. The Hypotheticalist may be absolved of the criticisms typically leveled against it concerning finkish dispositions, but on at least one way of construing the view it has to include hypothetical facts as truth makers. The Powerist can ground his claims and reductions with one less kind of entity in his theory. The picture for the Nomist seems even less promising. It requires metaphysical necessity on top of metaphysical necessity to make a reduction of powers go through. In contrast to the Nomist account, the Powerist reduction only requires the entities it begins with.

## Greatest Difficulty Argument in Plato's *Parmenides* 133c-134c

John Lindsay

In the *Parmenides* Plato shows us problems with his theory of forms through a series of arguments that Parmenides directs against Socrates. In this paper I will focus on the greatest difficulty argument from 133c-134c. Parmenides introduces the argument at 133a8-9: "Then do you see, Socrates...how great the difficulty is if one marks things off as forms, themselves by themselves?"<sup>1</sup> The argument takes us from this hypothesis to the absurd conclusion that "[the forms] cannot even be known [by us]" (133b4-6). There has been much secondary literature attempting to accurately interpret this argument. Sandra Peterson's influential paper<sup>2</sup> posits two arguments. In this paper I will show that one of these arguments (the passive) relies on an unintuitive premise, and I will offer a five-step interpretation of the entire passage that is not dependent on this premise.

### Step One (133c3-7)

In step one Parmenides proves **A**, that if  $x$  is a form then  $x$  is not in us. Peterson shows, and Rickless agrees, that Parmenides uses two premises to prove this.<sup>3</sup> He first posits at 133c4 that each form is itself for itself, and second at 133c4-6 that nothing in us is itself for itself.<sup>4</sup> This yields the conclusion **A**, said explicitly at 133c5, that "none of [the forms are] in us."

### Step Two (133c8-d6, 133e4-134a2)

Parmenides introduces in step two the principles **B<sub>F</sub>** and **B<sub>S</sub>**. At 133c8-d1 he says: "All the characters that are what they are in relation to each other have their being in relation to themselves but not in relation to things that belong to us." Peterson interprets this passage as **B<sub>F</sub>**: "If  $x$  is what it is in relation to  $y$ , then if  $x$  is a form,  $y$  is a form" (p. 7). She understands this principle to mean: "the answer to the question 'What is it?' asked about a form will not mention any non-forms" (p. 3). More broadly, she argues that for any  $x$  and  $y$ , if  $x$  is what it is in relation to  $y$  then  $x$  will be defined *only* by reference to  $y$  (p. 5).<sup>5</sup> For example if a knowledge is what it is in relation to a truth, then that knowledge will be defined only by reference to that truth (knowledge of  $x$ ).

Some commentators interpret **B<sub>F</sub>** as arguing for a divorce thesis: either relational forms (those which are what they are in relation to another) have no relations to non-forms<sup>6</sup> or all forms have no relations to what is in us.<sup>7</sup> However, as Rickless points out, it is unlikely that Parmenides would use the premise that forms have no relations to sensibles, because it is an

<sup>1</sup> All Greek translations by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan. See Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 367-368.

<sup>2</sup> Sandra Peterson, "The Greatest Difficulty for Plato's Theory of Forms: the Unknowability Argument of Parmenides 133c-134c," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 63 (1981): 1-16. Because I cite this paper so frequently I will cite page numbers from her article in the body of my text.

<sup>3</sup> See Peterson (ibid., 6-7); and Samuel Rickless, (1) "How Parmenides Saved the Theory of Forms," *The Philosophical Review* 107 (Oct. 1998): 535.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Rickless shows evidence from the *Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and *Timaeus* to support the second premise in (2) *Plato's Forms in Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-20.

<sup>5</sup> Peterson's interpretation might seem too extreme, but for this essay I will assume it.

<sup>6</sup> See Harold Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 283-4 n. 191; and Norio Fujisawa, "Εχεν, Μετέχεν, and Idioms of 'Paradigmatism' in Plato's Theory of Forms," *Phronesis* 19 (1974): 30-34.

<sup>7</sup> See Rudolph Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue: The Cratylus, the Protagoras, the Parmenides* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1973), 185-6.

essential part of Plato's theory of forms that sensibles have their properties by partaking of forms.<sup>8</sup> Peterson also gives another argument against this divorce thesis: the premise introduced at 134b12 would be immediately derivable if we interpret a divorce thesis (p. 11-12). Because we might want to (and I will argue that we should) interpret 134b12 as offering new content based on premises developed in the greatest difficulty argument, we should give up the divorce thesis interpretation.

At 133d2-5 Plato says: "These things that belong to us...are in their turn what they are in relation to themselves, but not in relation to the forms; and all the things named in this way are of themselves but not of the forms." Peterson interprets from "are...what they are in relation to themselves" and "are of themselves" **B<sub>S</sub>**: "If x is what it is in relation to y, then if x is in us then y is in us" (p. 7). At 133e4-134a1 Parmenides repeats principles **B<sub>F</sub>** and **B<sub>S</sub>**:

Things in us do not have their power in relation to forms, nor do they have theirs in relation to us; but, I repeat, forms are what they are of themselves and in relation to themselves, and things that belong to us are, in the same way, what they are in relation to themselves.

Parmenides uses the phrase "have their power," instead of "are what they are" or "have being" and I agree with Peterson that Plato offers nothing new in this change of phrase (p. 2-3). Likewise, instead of 'alongside us' (133c9-d2) he uses 'in us' (133e5) and instead of "in relation to things that belong to us" (133c9-d1) he uses "in relation to us" (133e5), and I take both of these pairs to contain equivalent phrases.

### **Step Three (133d7-133e4, 134a3-b2)**

In step three, Parmenides implies both **C<sub>M</sub>** and **C<sub>K</sub>**. He implies **C<sub>M</sub>**: if x is master of y then x is what it is in relation to y. To do so he argues [**C<sub>M</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**] and [**C<sub>M</sub>** combined with **B<sub>S</sub>**]. Then he implies **C<sub>K</sub>**: If x is knowledge of y then x is what it is in relation to y. To do so he argues [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**] and [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>S</sub>**]. Peterson only writes that **C<sub>K</sub>** is "suggested by 134a-b," (p. 6) and therefore she does not fully explain how Plato implies **C<sub>K</sub>**. The preceding implication of **C<sub>M</sub>** before **C<sub>K</sub>** is important because the symmetry between the master-slave example and the knowledge example is a necessary step for Plato to imply **C<sub>K</sub>**.<sup>9</sup> Parmenides says in 133e2-e4:

...being a human being, [somebody] is a master or slave of a human being.  
Mastery itself, on the other hand, is what it is of slavery itself; and in the same way, slavery itself is slavery of mastery itself.

At 133e3-4 he literally asserts [**C<sub>M</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**]: if x is master of y and x is a form, then y is a form. Then at 133e2-3 he argues [**C<sub>M</sub>** combined with **B<sub>S</sub>**]: if x is master of y and x is alongside us (a sensible), y is alongside us (a sensible). Therefore he implies **C<sub>M</sub>**: if x is master of y then x is what it is in relation to y.

Parmenides next says at 134a3-7:

<sup>8</sup> See Rickless (ibid. [2]), 88. 'Divorce Thesis' is Peterson's terminology (ibid., 3).

<sup>9</sup> Unlike Peterson, Rickless also seems to argue for the necessity of the symmetry: "knowledge is the sort of thing that (*like masters or slaves*) has only relative being" (ibid. [2], 90). James Forrester assumes the necessity in "Arguments an Able Man Could Refute: Parmenides 133b-134e," *Phronesis* 19 (1974): 234-236; and so does Frank Lewis who cites as evidence 134a3-4 and a6-7 in "Parmenides on Separation and the Knowability of the Forms: Plato Parmenides 133a ff.," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (Feb. 1979): 114. Forrester and Lewis both argue against the soundness of the symmetry in order to present the overall argument as unsuccessful.

So too...knowledge itself, what knowledge is, would be knowledge of that truth itself, which is what truth is...Furthermore, each particular knowledge, what it is, would be knowledge of some particular thing, of what that thing is.

He asserts two instances (at 134a3-4 concerning the form of knowledge itself and at 134a6-7 concerning each particular form of knowledge) of [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**]: if x is knowledge of y and x is a form, then y is a form. Then at 134a9-10 he says:

....But wouldn't knowledge that belongs to us be of the truth that belongs to our world? And wouldn't it follow that each particular knowledge that belongs to us is in turn knowledge of some particular thing in our world?

Here he presents a parallel set of two instances (concerning the form of knowledge itself and each form of each particular knowledge) of [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>S</sub>**]: if x is knowledge of y and x is alongside us (a sensible), y is alongside us (a sensible). He implies **C<sub>K</sub>**: If x is knowledge of y then x is what it is in relation to y.

#### **Step Four (134b3-10)**

Parmenides reaches the conclusion **D** in step four that there is no knowledge x of Form y in us. Parmenides first reminds us at 134b3-4 of **A**: “As you agree, we neither have the forms themselves nor can they belong to us.” As Peterson argues, without using 134b6-7 or 134b9, Parmenides can reach his desired conclusion **D** (p. 8). This is what Peterson calls the active argument. Parmenides only needs to combine **A** with [**C<sub>K</sub>\*** combined with **B<sub>S</sub>\***] (if x is knowledge of *Form* y and x is in us, then *Form* y is in us— note the specification of y as a form). This yields **D**: if x is knowledge of Form y, x is not in us.

At 134b6-7, Parmenides says: “And surely the kinds themselves, what each of them is, are known by the form of knowledge itself?” Many commentators interpret 134b6-7 as problematic self-predication where the form of knowledge itself ‘knows.’<sup>10</sup> However, given that self-predication does no work in the argument that I have presented, I agree with Peterson that Plato does not argue for self-predication.<sup>11</sup>

Peterson argues instead that 134b6-7 makes a claim about “the appropriate *kind* of knowledge itself” (p. 5-6). She says if 134b6-7 was actually about “knowledge itself” it should be at least compatible with 134a3-4 because that passage also describes “knowledge itself.” 134a3-4 says “knowledge itself” is of “truth-itself.” 134b6-7 says (assuming the equivalence of ‘x is knowledge of y’ and ‘y is known by x’) that “‘knowledge itself’ is of ‘particular [forms].” It doesn’t make sense for Plato to say knowledge itself is of two different things, so it seems we should accept 134a3-4 as describing ‘knowledge-itself,’ and 134b6-7 as describing particular forms of knowledge. I agree with Peterson on this interpretation that “knowledge-itself” refers to the appropriate kind of knowledge.

Peterson thinks that 134b6-7 begins the passive argument, and thus she interprets it as **2P**: if x is knowledge of y and y is a form, then x is a form (p. 8). To derive **2P**, Peterson says Plato combines **B<sub>F</sub>** (If y is what it is in relation to x, then if y is a form then x is a form) and an

<sup>10</sup> See F.M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (New York: Humanities Press, 1951), 98; Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 235-6; Weingartner (*ibid.*, 186); and Forrester (*ibid.*, 234).

<sup>11</sup> Peterson (*ibid.*, 4). Lewis also offers another argument against a “vicious” self-predication reading; he cites passages from the Charmides that suggest that Plato is *not* sensitive to a difference between a “syntactical” SP present in “is knowledge of” (does not attribute knowing to the form itself) and a “vicious” SP in “knows,” (does attribute ‘knowing’ to the form itself) and thus the “vicious” self-predication reading is unjustified (*ibid.*, 115-116).

unstated premise (**III**P in Peterson's notation), which is equivalent to: If x is knowledge of y then y is what it is in relation to x (p. 7). Peterson finally combines **A** with **2P** to yield **3P**: if x is knowledge of y and y is a form, then x is not in us (p. 7). **3P** is equivalent to **D**. Peterson interprets 134b9 as support for **3P** because Parmenides says: "the very thing we don't have," ('thing' refers to the x form of knowledge) (p. 7, 11).

However, I argue, as Rickless agrees,<sup>12</sup> that **III**P is too weak of a premise to attribute the passive argument to Plato. **III**P would "get such unwelcome results as: 'Justice itself is what it is pros [relative to] my knowledge of justice itself.'" <sup>13</sup> As Peterson argues, if something is what it is in relation to y, then it can only be defined by reference to y. Unlike knowledge, which seems like it can only be defined in reference to what it is of, it seems plainly false that to give a definition of what Justice is, someone would only be able to refer to my knowledge of Justice. Therefore Plato would not have used the passive argument, which requires **III**P.

Thus I think we are left with two options. One: salvage Peterson's passive argument in a way that would not require **III**P or two: reject Peterson's passive argument and interpret 134b6-7 and 134b9 as separate from the passive argument. The problem with option two is that the only way to interpret 134b6-7 and 134b9 as separate from the passive argument renders them superfluous.

The most natural way to interpret 134b6-7 as separate from the passive argument is to interpret it as repeating the content of 134a6-7 (besides switching 'knowledge of' to 'is known by' and switching the subject and predicate): "Furthermore, each particular knowledge, what it is, would be knowledge of some particular thing, of what that thing is."<sup>14</sup> Recall that we interpreted 134a6-7 as [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**]: if x is knowledge of y and x is a form, then y is a form. We would interpret 134b9 as combining **A** with [**C<sub>K</sub>** combined with **B<sub>F</sub>**] to yield: if x is knowledge of y and x is a form, then y is a form and x is not in us. However, this does not get Plato any closer to **D**, even though it is not necessarily repetitive.<sup>15</sup>

It does not seem likely to me that Plato would waste time writing unnecessary words, and therefore I will offer a modified Peterson passive argument that is not dependent on **III**P. I argue that we need to change **2P** to **2P†**: If x is knowledge of y then x is a form iff y is a form. This is derived from a new premise, **B<sub>F</sub>†**, combined with **C<sub>K</sub>**. The premise **B<sub>F</sub>†** is: if x is what is in relation to y then x is a form iff y is a form. The premise **B<sub>F</sub>†** would have serious implications for our interpretations of 133c8-d5, 133e2-134a1, and 134a3-10.

For step two it seems reasonable to change our interpretation from **B<sub>F</sub>** to **B<sub>F</sub>†** because "are what they are in relation to each other" (133c8), "have their being in relation to themselves" (133c9), and "are what they are of themselves" (133e6) seem to allow the additional restriction added to the consequent of **B<sub>F</sub>**: "AND if y is a form, then x is a form." Likewise Plato uses the same phrases to argue for the proposition that we interpreted as **B<sub>S</sub>**, and thus it seems that we

<sup>12</sup> Rickless (ibid. [1], 535-536).

<sup>13</sup> Peterson admits this result from **III**P, but she still attributes the passive argument and **III**P to Plato (ibid., 9).

<sup>14</sup> Lewis assumes 134b6-7 is repeating 134a3-4 and *by implication*, 134a6-7; however, unlike me he reads 134b6-7 as about "knowledge itself" (without a "vicious" self-predication) (ibid., 116).

<sup>15</sup> Because he denies the passive argument, but agrees with the rest of Peterson's argument, this is how I understand Rickless to interpret 134b6-7 and 134b9 (ibid. [2], 90). Rickless thinks that **B<sub>F</sub>** (what he calls premise A) is not used in the 'greatest difficulty' argument to get to the conclusion, but is only used in the 'more terrible' argument (ibid. [2], 85-93).

can, and *should* to maintain symmetry, interpret  $\mathbf{B}_S$  as  $\mathbf{B}_S\ddagger$ , if  $x$  is what is in relation to  $y$  then  $x$  is in us iff  $y$  is in us.

It also seems reasonable to change our interpretations of  $\mathbf{B}_S$  and  $\mathbf{B}_F$  within the master-slave example of step three to  $\mathbf{B}_S\ddagger$  and  $\mathbf{B}_F\ddagger$ . At 133e2-3 Parmenides says “a master *or* slave of,” thereby legitimizing the addition to the consequent of  $\mathbf{B}_S$ : “AND if  $y$  is in us, then  $x$  is in us.” For 133e3-4, Parmenides likewise describes mastery as “of slavery itself,” and slavery as “of mastery itself,” thus making  $\mathbf{B}_F\ddagger$  reasonable. Unfortunately, for the knowledge example at 134a3-10,  $\mathbf{B}_S\ddagger$  and  $\mathbf{B}_F\ddagger$  are not explicitly stated. In both the knowledge itself and particular knowledge instances, Parmenides only describes knowledge as *of* an object of knowledge. However, given the weakness of  $\mathbf{IIP}$ , I assert that Plato does indeed imply  $\mathbf{B}_S\ddagger$  and  $\mathbf{B}_F\ddagger$ .

To get from  $2P\ddagger$  to  $\mathbf{D}$ , consider the following.  $2P\ddagger$  is equivalent to: if  $x$  is knowledge of  $y$  then [(if  $x$  is a form then  $y$  is a form) and (if  $y$  is a form then  $x$  is a form)]. Combining  $2P\ddagger$  with  $\mathbf{A}$  (if  $x$  is a form then  $x$  is not in us), we can assert: if  $x$  is knowledge of  $y$  then [(if  $x$  is a form then  $y$  is a form and  $x$  is not in us) and (if  $y$  is a form then  $x$  is not in us)]. We can cite 134b9 “the very thing we don’t have,” as evidence of Plato supporting the combination of  $\mathbf{A}$  with  $2P\ddagger$ . Lastly, assuming only that  $y$  is a form, we have the conclusion  $\mathbf{D}$ : if  $x$  is knowledge of Form  $y$  then  $x$  is not in us. Overall I support two routes to  $\mathbf{D}$ : the active route from  $\mathbf{A}$  with [ $\mathbf{C}_K^*$  combined with  $\mathbf{B}_S^*$ ] and the passive route from  $\mathbf{A}$  with  $2P\ddagger$ .

#### Step Five (134b11-c3)

In the last step Parmenides goes from  $\mathbf{D}$  to his overall conclusion that we do not know the forms. For Peterson’s active argument (which uses  $\mathbf{D}$  from the active route), Peterson reaches her overall conclusion with three premises.

Her first premise  $\mathbf{E}$  is: we are called by a name of the form  $\Phi$  iff there is a likeness of the form  $\Phi$  in us (p. 7). She gets this from 133d1-2: “Whether one posits the latter as likenesses or in some other way, it is by *partaking of them* that we come to be called by their various names. Peterson’s translates the clause: “things alongside us...having which,” which she says: “tells us that some of the things alongside us are the same as what is *had* by us, i.e., in us” (p. 3). Thus she translates the  $\mu\epsilon\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$  (here translated as ‘partaking of’) of this sentence as “having,” and the relative plural pronoun  $\tilde{\omicron}\nu$  (here translated as ‘them’) as referring to the likenesses.

Her next premise  $\mathbf{F}$  (unstated in Parmenides 133c-134c) is: if anything  $x$  is a likeness of a form  $\Phi$ ,  $x$  is a  $\Phi$  (p. 7) We can look at Phaedo 102c2,4,7, where having a likeness of a form gives a human the form’s quality. Lastly, she uses premise  $\mathbf{G}$  (also unstated in Parmenides 133c-134c): ‘knows Form  $y$ ’ and its active inflections are names of the Form of knowledge in us of Form  $y$  (p. 7). Altogether, because there is nothing that is a knowledge in us of Form  $y$ , (1) by  $\mathbf{F}$ , there is nothing  $x$  that it is a likeness of the Form of knowledge in us of Form  $y$ . (2) By  $\mathbf{E}$  we are not called by a name of the Form of knowledge in us of Form  $y$ , and (3) by  $\mathbf{G}$  we are not called by ‘knows Form  $y$ .’ All the premises for this conclusion have appeared before 134b2 (unless we count 134b3-4 where Parmenides reminds us of  $\mathbf{A}$ ).

For her passive argument, Peterson uses only the unstated premise  $\mathbf{H}$  (which is essentially a simplified version of  $\mathbf{E}$ ,  $\mathbf{F}$ , and  $\mathbf{G}$ ): if we know anything  $y$ , then there is some knowledge  $x$  in us such that  $x$  is knowledge of  $y$  (p. 7).<sup>16</sup>  $\mathbf{H}$  combined with  $\mathbf{D}$  yields immediately the conclusion that we do not know any forms. Therefore her passive conclusion matches Plato’s words at 134b11: “So none of the forms is known by us.” At 134b12 Parmenides says, “because we don’t partake of knowledge itself.” In her passive argument Peterson interprets “partake of” as “have,”

<sup>16</sup> Unlike Peterson, Rickless uses  $\mathbf{H}$  to get from  $\mathbf{D}$  (*from the active route*) to the conclusion (ibid. [1], 535-536).

an interpretation supported by Cornford and Fujisawa.<sup>17</sup> When she uses **H**, Peterson interprets 134b12 as repeating the content of 134b9 (p. 8, 11).<sup>18</sup>

However again I do not think that Plato would repeat unnecessary words, so I will offer an interpretation of 134b12 in which μετέχειν means “partake of,” not “have,” and it explains Parmenides’s final steps. Peterson admits the possibility of 134b12 meaning “partake of,” however she does not specify exactly how 134b12 would support the premises that take Plato from **D** to his conclusion (p. 11). Peterson does think that “knowledge itself” in 134b12 means the appropriate kind of knowledge x of Form y, to maintain symmetry with her interpretation of 134b6-7 and 134b9, and I agree with this (p. 11).

At 134b12 I think Plato is using the verb μετέχειν (translated here “partake of”) as he uses it traditionally at Parmenides 130b2-4 and in the Phaedo (102c2,4,7, 103b6) to mean “partake of,” which is the relation of the sensibles to the form.<sup>19</sup> To understand why, we must turn back to 133d1-2, where Peterson translated the μετέχειν as “having,” and the relative plural pronoun ὧν as referring to the likenesses. Fujisawa agrees with Peterson on this translation because he thinks Plato incorrectly uses μετέχειν instead of ἔχειν in both the ‘greatest difficulty’ argument and the ‘more terrible’ argument to serve his introduction of an alternative use of πρός at 133c8ff (p. 34). It seems reasonable to think that if Plato introduced a new sense of the word πρός, he would rely on traditional uses of his other words to not further confuse his readers. It also seems acceptable to me to take ὧν as referring to the forms.<sup>20</sup> In addition, if we translate μετέχειν in 133d1-2 as “partaking of,” then we can read Plato’s use of μετέχειν in 134b12 as referring back to a modified **E\*** premise introduced at 133d1-2.

Therefore we can interpret 133d1-2 as **E\***: we are called by a name of the Form  $\Phi$  iff we partake of the Form  $\Phi$ . We would add an unstated premise **I**: we partake of the Form  $\Phi$  iff there is a likeness of the form  $\Phi$  in us. The idea that partaking of the form  $\Phi$  is equivalent to having the likeness of the form  $\Phi$  is suggested for example in the Phaedo 100d-102c and Peterson herself agrees (p. 10). Now consider the argument: because there is nothing that is a knowledge in us of Form y, (1) by **F**, there is nothing x that is a likeness of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y; (2) By **I** we do not partake of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y; (3) By **E\*** we are not called by a name of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y; and (4) by **G** we are not called by ‘knows Form y.’ Now we can interpret 134b12 as asserting (2).<sup>21</sup>

Overall I have offered a five-step interpretation of the ‘greatest difficulty’ argument in Parmenides 133c-134c. I argued specifically to change Peterson’s passive argument in order to

<sup>17</sup> Cornford interprets it as “have” because of reasons related to his assumption that 134b6-7 shows “vicious” self-predication (ibid., 99). Fujisawa interprets it as “have” because he thinks all sensibles partake of forms, and thus to say they do not *partake of* a form is false (ibid., 33). However, as I will show it seems entirely acceptable *within the passive argument* to say that we do not partake of the appropriate form of knowledge of Form y.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis also thinks that 134b12 is repeating 134b9, which, unlike Peterson’s interpretation, is itself instantiating the point made at 134b3-4 (that we do not have the forms) to: “the form of knowledge, too is not present in us” (ibid., 116, 126 n. 20). It seems to me that Lewis derives his overall conclusion only from 134a3-4 and 134b9, and thus his argument resembles something like Peterson’s passive argument.

<sup>19</sup> Fujisawa points out this traditional use of μετέχειν (ibid., 31, 32, n. 4)

<sup>20</sup> Cited by Fujisawa (ibid., 32, n. 8), Cherniss (ibid., n. 101, 102) and two other commentators support this reading.

<sup>21</sup> We could use this apparatus with **D** from the active and passive routes. Peterson herself might have had a similar “apparatus” in mind, as the one premise that she offers to connect **D** to the conclusion while interpreting μετέχειν in 134b12 as “partaking of” is: “If a form x is some knowledge of something y, then any likeness z of x is a knowledge of y” (ibid., 11).

avoid reliance on the weak premise **IIIP** and to change the premises that Parmenides uses to go from **D** to the conclusion in order to interpret 134b12 as contributing to the argument.

#### APPENDIX

I have organized this according to the five steps of the paper. Notice that all premises of active argument occur before 134b3-4 but some premises of passive argument occur after 134b3-4.

#### STEP ONE:

**A** If x is a form then x is not in us. 133c3-7

#### STEP TWO:

**B<sub>F</sub>** If x is what it is in relation to y, then if x is a form, y is a form. 133c8-d1 , 133e4-134a1

**B<sub>S</sub>** If x is what it is in relation to y, then if x is in us then y is in us. 133d2-5 , 133e4-134a1

#### STEP THREE:

**C<sub>M</sub>** If x is master of y then x is what it is in relation to y. 133e2-e4

**C<sub>K</sub>** If x is knowledge of y then x is what it is in relation to y. 134a3-7, 134a9-10

#### STEP FOUR:

##### **Peterson's Active Argument Part I.**

**C<sub>K</sub>\*** If x is knowledge of *Form* y then x is what it is in relation to *Form* y. (instantiated **C<sub>K</sub>** of step three)

**B<sub>S</sub>\*** If x is what it is in relation to *Form* y, then if x is in us then *Form* y is in us. (instantiated **B<sub>S</sub>** of step two)

**D**: If x is knowledge of *Form* y, x is not in us. (**A** 134b3-4 + [**C<sub>K</sub>\*** + **B<sub>S</sub>\***] 134a9-10)

##### **Peterson's Passive Argument Part I.**

**IIIP** If x is knowledge of y then y is what it is in relation to x. (unstated)

**2P** If x is knowledge of y and y is a form, then x is a form. (**B<sub>F</sub>** + **IIIP**) 134b6-7

**3P (Equivalent to D)**: if x is knowledge of y and y is a form, then x is not in us. (**A** + **2P**) 134b9

##### **Revised Passive Argument Part I** (does not rely on unintuitive **IIIP**).

**B<sub>F</sub>†** If x what it is in relation to y then x is a form iff y is a form. 133c8-9, 133e6, 133e3-4

**B<sub>S</sub>†** If x is what is in relation to y then x is in us iff y is in us. 133c8-9, 133e6, 133e2-3

**2P†** If x is knowledge of y then x is a form iff y is a form. (**B<sub>F</sub>†** + **C<sub>K</sub>**) 134b6-7

**D** If x is knowledge of *Form* y then x is not in us. (**A** + **2P†**) 134b9

#### STEP FIVE:

##### **Peterson's Active Argument Part II.**

**D** There is nothing that is a knowledge in us of *Form* y. (conclusion of Active Argument Part I)

**F** If anything x is a likeness of a form  $\Phi$ , x is a  $\Phi$  (unstated, but I suggest *Phaedo* 102c2,4,7)

**E** We are called by a name of the form  $\Phi$  iff there is a likeness of the form  $\Phi$  in us. 133d1-2

**G** 'Knows *Form* y' is a name of the *Form* of knowledge in us of *Form* y (unstated).

There is nothing x that it is a likeness of the *Form* of knowledge in us of *Form* y. (**D** + **F**)

We are not called by a name of the *Form* of knowledge in us of *Form* y. [(**D** + **F**) + **E**]

We are not called by 'knows Form y.'  $[(\mathbf{D} + \mathbf{F}) + \mathbf{E}] + \mathbf{G}$

**Peterson's Passive Argument Part II.**

**H:** If we know anything y, then there is some knowledge x in us of y (unstated)

**D:** There is no knowledge x in us of Form y. (conclusion of Passive Argument Part I)

We do not know any forms.  $(\mathbf{H} + \mathbf{D})$  134b11

**Revised Passive Argument Part II** (makes use of 134b12\*).

**D** There is nothing that is a knowledge in us of Form y. (conclusion of Passive Argument Part I)

**F** If anything x is a likeness of a form  $\Phi$ , x is a  $\Phi$  (unstated, but I suggest Phaedo 102c2,4,7)

**I:** We partake of the Form  $\Phi$  iff there is a likeness of the form  $\Phi$  in us. (Phaedo 100d-102c)

**E\*:** We are called by a name of the Form  $\Phi$  iff we partake of the Form  $\Phi$ . 133d1-2

**G** 'Knows Form y' is a name of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y (unstated).

There is nothing x that it is a likeness of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y.  $(\mathbf{D} + \mathbf{F})$

We do not partake of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y.  $[(\mathbf{D} + \mathbf{F}) + \mathbf{I}]$  \*134b12

We are not called by a name of the Form of knowledge in us of Form y  $[(\mathbf{D} + \mathbf{F}) + \mathbf{I}] +$

**E\*]**

We are not called by 'knows Form y.'  $[[(\mathbf{D} + \mathbf{F}) + \mathbf{I}] + \mathbf{E*}] + \mathbf{G}$