A showcase for undergraduate students at Kent State-Stark who achieved writing excellence.
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Letter from the Editors

The Writing Center Review is a student publication dedicated to student writers who have shown excellence in their writing assignments at Kent State University at Stark. It is compiled, edited, and written by students with the help of the faculty on campus. The Writing Center Review is truly a place for students to showcase their talent and to also learn from their peers. The writing showcased in The Writing Review also exemplifies the most important goal of writing and writing assignments—to engage in a dialogue with the academic world, both regionally and outside our campus.

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Detrimental Effects of Absence in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein

By Patricia Catherine Cotter

Assignment Description: Make and defend a claim about Frankenstein, then use both your own evidence/analysis and source materials to defend that claim.

The major theme of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein is uncovered in the exchange between the creature and a blind man. During their conversation, the creature says, “I trust that by your aid, I shall not be driven from the society and sympathy of your fellow creatures” (Shelley 94). To which the blind man replies, “Heaven forbid! Even if you were really a criminal; for that can only drive you to desperation, and not instigate you to virtue” (94). Shelley avows that society and sympathy are vital for a person’s well-being, without which a person would despair and because “virtue is a capacity that must be exercised in conjunction with others and is stifled in isolation” (Bernatchez 208), the opportunity to exercise virtue becomes practically non-existent to the one excluded from society and sympathy. The blind man is Shelley’s chosen messenger for her theme, because he can be trusted. Readers are conditioned by Shelley to trust the blind man before the creature has ever interacted with him through the creature’s account of the old man’s virtues and his belief that the man’s blindness will prevent him from rejecting the creature based on sight. This theme is so important to Shelley that she reinforces it by causing Victor to mirror the creature’s experience, doubling the impact of her message.

Shelley’s novel demonstrates the systematic dismantling of opportunities for the creature to experience society and sympathy through various acts of oppression and lack of knowledge afforded to recognized members of the human race. The entire account of his existence is laced with instances where the lack of society and sympathy have robbed him of essential elements needed to develop the character for a virtuous life. First of all, the creature’s birth experience is likened to a mother who, after the birth of her child, casts that child from her and refuses to feed it. Victor refused to parent his ugly baby, leaving the creature to fend for himself. He is “abandoned at birth and viewed throughout strictly as expendable by his creator” (Vlasopolos 132). Victor’s abandonment of his offspring becomes the first act of civilized oppression perpetrated against the creature, because, according to Jean Harvey, “Civilized oppression … often involves acts of omission” (14). The creature enters the world of men alone, with no one to guide him, no one to protect him, feed him or give him understanding. He is denied society and sympathy because of his appearance. Upon his first encounter with a human being, the old man “shrieked loudly, and, quitting the hut, ran across the fields with a speed of which his debilitated form hardly appeared capable” (Shelley 72). By the time the creature is rejected by a crowd of village people his trust has begun to dissipate. He is unjustly excluded, not “as a consequence of his crimes … but as a result of his appearance” (Vlasopolos 132). At this point in his experience, the creature has been exposed to abandonment, rejection based on appearances, and “othering,” where a being is judged to be less than human because he or she is different from the expected norm.
Trust plays an important role in the development of society and sympathy, and exclusion undermines trust. “Mutual orientation and trust have become essential to interaction. It is a process of overcoming the difference through reciprocity, rather than creating difference through exclusion” (Rawls and David 470). When the give and take of interaction occurs, the opportunity for resolving differences also occurs. Interactions allow people to prove their trustworthiness (475). The creature’s exclusion from any interaction at all harms his ability to trust and denies him the right to provide evidence of his good will by virtuous acts.

The creature is able to observe reciprocity demonstrated between the members of the De Lacey household when the old man’s children “performed towards him every little office of affection and duty with gentleness; and he rewarded them by his benevolent smiles” (Shelley 76), but he is excluded from that reciprocity, society and sympathy, and the situation weighs heavily upon him to the point that he decides to do something about it. He, as a fledgling creature, has no understanding of the unspoken communication between men. His features are grotesque, unable to express recognizable human emotion. Even Victor’s encounters with his creation only mention the creature’s ghastly grin. Russell Blackford argues that “our successful day-to-day interaction with each other involves the continual reciprocation of understanding, concern and respect” which is communicated by universally recognized facial expressions which the creature is unable to mimic (533). The result of the creature’s inability to communicate non-verbally constitutes another barrier to society and sympathy. Blackford goes on to say, “At the individual level, a human being who lacked the normal repertoire of emotional expression, or the normal psychological capacity to understand it, would be severely disadvantaged” (533).

Throughout the latter part of the creature’s voyeuristic association with his cottagers, he experiences tension between the knowledge of his exclusion from normal relations with humans and the lack of knowledge of what to do about it. His knowledge of language and reading increases over time but so does his dissatisfaction. From Milton’s Paradise Lost, which he believes to be an actual account, the creature becomes aware of his inferior status in the grand scheme of things when he says, “Like Adam, I was created apparently by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless and alone” (Shelley 90). He has no father to correct his self-image, no one to direct and refine his reasoning skills. Carol Hay postulates that “lack of access to formal education” can affect people’s ability “to develop various analytical reasoning skills” (28). The creature’s reasoning is at the mercy of his belief, spawned by oppression, that he is inferior to man when exterior oppression invades his interior and he begins to believe in the negative stereotype that the oppressor has painted of him, becoming stunted in self-development and self-esteem as a result (Harvey 18). The creature’s waking life is a hell of conflict, and although he feels an overwhelming affection for his cottagers, the contrast between his status and opportunities and theirs reinforces his low self-esteem. At night, however, he can fight the negative self-images through dreaming. In his dream
world, he can imagine a life of acceptance. The creature explained his dream life in this way—"I looked upon them [the cottagers] as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanor and conciliating words, I should win their favor, and afterwards their love" (Shelley 79). His dreams were probably the healthiest thing he could have for himself at this time, for they allowed him to "reflect quite a lot about who he would be if the freedom and fair opportunity existed" (Harvey 20). The creature attempted to redefine his negative self-image by adopting the virtues he perceived his cottagers and book heroes to have. Unfortunately, several factors undermined him. One factor was that he had acquired knowledge, but his emotions ruled him. Throughout the text, he speaks of his feelings. Had he been raised by a father, he would have been taught to master his emotions, not vice versa. The other factor that undermined him was the inability to account for natural fears of even virtuous people, like his cottagers, in seeing an eight foot man in close proximity.

The creature’s encounter with his cottagers terminates in disaster, and it is the end of his attempts to identify with humanity. His ability to think rationally is severely impaired as evidenced by his plan to kidnap Victor’s brother, William, and to force him to overcome any revulsion he felt upon seeing the creature’s face. The creature was definitely acting irrationally when he murdered the child for opposing him. Carol Hay lists three sources that harm a person’s ability to think rationally—trauma, neglect, and oppression (24). The creature was exposed to all three sources. He had just been traumatized by being rejected by a family he loved, had been neglected by his creator, and had constantly been subjected to the by-products of oppression. When the creature met William on the path, he was partially recovered from a gunshot wound which he received from an angry human after he had tried to rescue a girl from drowning. Hay argues that an experience such as that would affect him when she says, "The terror or trauma oppressed people can experience when they face violence, or even the threat of violence, can also impair their rational capacities" (25).

Revenge against his creator almost completely replaces rational thought. However, there is one more attempt made to gain the prize of society and sympathy. The creature must appeal to his maker. Unfortunately, the creature does not find an outward show of sympathy that he needs to see from Victor, due to his involvement in the deaths of William and Justine. He has proven himself to be untrustworthy by his destructive actions. The creature appeals to Victor’s sense of justice—"You had endowed me with perceptions and passions, and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind. But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from any other being that wore the human form” (Shelley 98). In order to be just, Victor must create a mate for the creature that would give him the society and sympathy he craves. Although Victor agrees to the project, he reneges, which precipitates a killing spree on the part of the creature. The second part of Shelley’s theme for this novel is realized. Separation from society and sympathy does “not instigate [him] to virtue” (Shelley 94).

You will recall that I claimed Shelley reiterated her theme in Victor’s experience.
It is at this point in the novel, when Victor has ripped the bride of the creature apart limb from limb, that his experience begins to mirror that of his creature. Heightened revenge rules the creature, who decides to wipe all traces of society and sympathy from Victor’s life, leaving Victor to experience the same pain that the creature has lived with all his life. He begins by killing everyone who is dear to Victor – Clerval and Elizabeth – except for Victor’s father who dies shortly from grief. Victor’s entire existence has been supported by the sympathy of his loved ones as evidenced by the tone of the many letters written to him and found within the pages of the novel. Now Victor has no one who will sympathize with him – no one to take his troubles to. Even a magistrate in whom he confides the particulars of creature’s actions does not sympathize with him, and he leaves his presence in disgust. Victor becomes just like the monster in singleness of purpose. He will have his revenge. One of the most telling lines in the novel in regards to this argument is when Victor tells Walton, “Swear that he shall not triumph over my accumulated woes, and live to make another such a wretch as I am” (Shelley 150). In this statement, Victor is admitting that creature and he are mirror images of one another. They are both creators, having made wretches of one another and withdrawing the only things that would lead them to virtue – the positive interaction, society and sympathy of others. Victor even resembles the creature in his behavior when he is dying. Shelley wrote, “Sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones, and related the most horrible incidents with a tranquil voice, suppressing every mark of agitation, then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor” (151).

Society and sympathy are vital elements for the promotion of emotional well-being, rational thought, and virtuous living. The importance of this theme to the structure of Frankenstein is apparent by its absence in the life of the creature, and by the consequences resulting from its exclusion. Society and sympathy are a treasured human birthright that Victor took for granted and that the creature craved and envied. His attempts to sever Victor from society and sympathy were only partially successful, because once Victor had experienced these, he could relive the experience at any time in his mind. The creature was never that fortunate. His dreams were only make-believe.
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Perhaps one would never equate a prostitute with having compassion. Perhaps we see her as a tainted, cold, and bitter shell of a woman whose only desire is the dollar. Certainly, in the period that Dostoyevsky wrote Notes from Underground (Russia in 1864), the prostitute was treated worse than a flea-bitten cur. And yet this prostitute, Liza, becomes the compassionate and noble heroine in the story. The unnamed and unknown narrator finds something within Liza that reminds him of his “good” self. She is familiar to him in an unfamiliar way. He is uncomfortably comfortable with her as they lay next to each other in the dark. It’s at this point in the reading that we see a man with compassion. He opens up to the prostitute as he has never opened up before. It’s a fleeting moment for the manic narrator, one that we as the reader want to hang on to. We silently cheer him on in his kindness towards Liza. We are given hope that this spiteful, diseased, and unpleasant man has actually found a cure. The cure is Liza.

The Underground Man woke up in a strange bed, suffering with what must have been a horrendous hangover as he realized he was in “that place,” a place where men stumble in after a night of over-drinking, stumbling into the arms of the prostitute. As he came to his senses, the memory of the night flooded into his being, and suddenly he realized he was not alone. He was one of two strangers lying side by side in an unsympathetic bed. The room is dark, a lonely candle providing a flicker of minimal light. The Underground Man initially refers to the prostitute as a “creature,” a creature that he had not spoken one word to as she performed her duty. She is staring at him, making him “uneasy,” he finally engages in conversation. He asks her name, she replies, “Liza.”

The Underground Man, lying in the dark, starts to talk, and talk, and talk. He goes into a dissertation on the evils of prostitution. He paints a picture for Liza of what her future might be if she does not leave this godforsaken profession. He tells her, “you’ll lose everything here, everything, without exception - your health, youth, beauty, and hope” (691). Liza listens but does not speak. The man starts to feel something in his heart, this man who has such disdain for all humans, and life itself. In his attempt to save the prostitute named Liza, will Liza actually save him? Don’t hold your breath.

Just when the reader thinks this man, this unknown man undeserving of a name, has perhaps taken the baby steps to engage in the social world, the reader is then thrown back into the dark underground with the no hopes of ever seeing the light again. To bear witness to his plunge into the sublime is heart breaking, as we know he will never come back. Liza was his only hope. She disappears into the “wet snow,” as he disappears into the darkest and deepest hole with no possible return. She showed
empathy for him, and in the end his hatred of himself becomes the victor. He has proven once again that he is right. He cannot be loved. And just as he warned Liza about becoming a slave to prostitution, he has become a slave to the dark.

One of the most honest quotes in his notes is, “I grew up without a family; that must be why I turned out the way I did—so unfeeling” (687). I, like Liza, have compassion for this man. I have empathy. In the billions of cells in his body, there is that one little cell that screams for help, in the dark where nobody will ever hear him again. The compassionate prostitute touched him like no other, but deep inside his soul he knew he would destroy her not-so-innocent innocence. And not even this wretch of a man could do that to the prostitute with compassion.

Works Cited

Racial Inequality in Access to Green Space in Stark County

By Cassandra J. White

Assignment Description: Is there a relationship between race and access to trailheads? What do you suggest to Stark Parks? Explore the issues and ideas surrounding these questions in your assignment.

With rising healthcare costs and a prevalence of diagnoses of depression, an upstream approach to dealing with mental illness would be highly beneficial for society overall. Kaplan and Kaplan state, “People with access to nearby natural settings have been found to be healthier overall than other individuals. The longer-term, indirect impacts (of ‘nearby nature’) also include increased levels of satisfaction with one’s home, one’s job and with life in general” (Brown, Maller, Pryor, St Leger, & Townsend, 2005, p. 47). Research on the correlation between green space and well-being should be conducted as it might be a potential preventative approach to dealing with the incidence of depression. Because research shows how important access to nature is, it is also important to analyze whether or not everyone has equal access to nature. In this paper I will analyze the relationship between race and access to Stark county parks in Central Ohio.

Literature Review

Access to green space is very important for everyone as it provides a safe, free place to exercise, view nature, and be a part of a natural environment. Simply being in a natural environment can provide many health benefits to individuals. There is much evidence supporting this notion. There are nature based therapeutic programs which have been successful in improving a sense of well-being in participants. Also, exposure to natural environments fosters recovery from stress. People with access to nature are generally healthier than those who are not close to a natural setting. In addition, those people who have access are happier with their life in general (Maller et al., 2005). Thus, green space is a valuable resource, and it is very important for everyone to have access.

Inequality occurs when a group does not have access to a resource because of their group membership and not characteristics of an individual. This occurrence creates a system of privilege and oppression between groups (Johnson, 2006). Racial inequality occurs when there is a disparity in access to a resource based on race. A recent study found lower classes are negatively associated in access to green space at a national level in urban areas (Wen et al., 2013). There is also research suggesting positive associations between lower socioeconomic status and racial segregation (Darden et al., 2010). Drawing from the aforementioned literature, the hypothesis is as follows: There will be a relationship between the areas of racial diversity and access to Stark Parks' existing and proposed trail heads.

Methods

This report will analyze the relationship of racial demographics in census blocks and the location of existing and proposed Stark Parks' trail heads. Trailhead data was provided by Stark Parks. I used census data...
from 2012 for the diversity index which provided the percentage of white residents in each census block. Information from Stark Parks and census data was mapped with ARCGis Explorer. Then, \( t \) tests were used in the analyses.

**Results**

First, I used the 2012 census data on the diversity index to map the locations of existing and proposed trail heads. Levels of diversity in Stark County is measured by a diversity index which shows the likelihood of two persons selected from the same area are from a different race in the same 2012 census tract. This is illustrated below in Figure 1. Each green pin notes a proposed or existing trail head by Stark Parks. Trailhead information was provided by Stark Parks and mapped onto ArcGIS Explorer Online. There seemed to be a relationship such that more racially diverse areas had fewer trail heads available to residents.

![Figure 1: Diversity Index of Stark County, Ohio and Existing and Proposed Trail](image)

Secondly, to test this potential relationship I performed an independent samples \( t \)-test to determine if there was any significance between index of diversity and existing or proposed trail heads. There were 85 census blocks with existing and proposed trail heads, while 185 blocks had no proposed or existing trails. No significance was found in the first analysis of diversity of proposed trail or not. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below. However, significance was found in the variables existing trail or not and proposed and existing. This is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. Thus, inequality is observed in the variables existing trail or not and proposed and existing.

![Figure 2: Mean Percentage White Population by Proposed Trailhead or Not](image)
addition, residents of urban areas may rent or own land that could be considered as a form of green space.

Conclusion

In sum, because significance was found, and consequently inequality was observed, an effort should be made to establish trailheads in Canton, Massillon, and Alliance where the diversity index is high in order to create more equal access to green space. Perhaps a trail between Crenshaw Park and Albert Reiter Park in Canton. In general, more attention should be paid to racial diversity in the areas where new trailheads are proposed. Future research should address and include other forms of green space such as other parks systems. In
References


Irish Airport Chat

By Robin Clark

Assignment Description: Write a 3-4 page paper detailing a trip to another country told from a creative stance. Research on travel, hotel accommodations, cultural events, and specific amounts of money spent.

“Oh, excuse me.”
“I’m sorry.”
“No, it was my fault. I think I have too many bags for this line. And my hoodie is weighing me down. I’m not used to the airport, if you can’t tell! Actually, travel in general baffles me unless I’m in a car…”
“You do have a lot of bags and stuff there. Where you heading with all that?”
“Ireland.”
“Really? Me too! Business or pleasure?”
“Pleasure.”
“Ah, yeah, same here.”
“Travelling alone?”
“I’m meeting up with my fiancé in England. He’s originally from Dublin, so we’re visiting his family and friends. He’s on holiday with his best man, enjoying the single life with one last hoorah.”
“Oh, that sounds like fun.”
“Yep, I’m off to ruin theirs!”
“Oh, I’m sure!”
“Do you have a travel buddy too?”
“Oh no, it’s just me. I just graduated after almost a decade at Kent State University and I’m off to enjoy a little holiday while my boyfriend is scouting apartments for us.”
“Yes?”
“Yes, he just got accepted to an MFA program out of state and we need to figure out our living situation before it starts. So I’m giving him some time to pack and see all of his family and friends before we leave them for the next two or three years, and I get to go on basically my dream vacation.”

“That sounds great! So, since this line doesn’t seem to be moving, tell me about your plans for Ireland! Where are you staying? For how long? What are you going to do and see?”
“Oh, well… I’m staying for about two weeks… Yeah, today’s the sixth and I get back on June 19th, so just shy of two weeks.”
“Awesome! Who’d you buy your plane tickets through and how much did you pay, if you don’t mind my asking? I’m always shopping around for a cheaper way to travel.”
“Oh, I hear that. I used cheapoair.com. Round trip was about $950; $885 in airfare and $97.68 in taxes and fees.”
“That’s not too bad!”
“My thoughts exactly! And I actually got a good price on an adorable apartment in Dublin too. Vrbo.com is this awesome rental site that my boyfriend and I have used before. We celebrated in October 2013 when I was accepted into an internship program I never thought I’d get into by renting a farmhouse for a weekend.”
“Bow chick-a wa-wa?”
“Nope! We just watched movies and cooked and explored the farm and stuff. It was so much fun! So, I used the same site to look for an apartment in Dublin and I found this charming little flat on Luas Red Line. It’s a weekly fee of €750, but the owners seem likely to make me a deal since I won’t need the full two weeks. I’m hoping for maybe €1000 or €1250 instead of €1500.”
“What’s the exchange rate right now? Wouldn’t that be something like… two…”
“About $2000, American.”
“Sheesh.”
“Yep. But the owners seem really cool and I’ve used customer reviews of the property to look up things to do in the area, like pubs and stuff.”
“Find anything cool?”
“Yeah, actually. Let me look at my travel notebook... Ah, yeah. The Black Lion Pub is the name of one. There’s the Lime Tree Café, Le Bon Crubeen, and Hugo’s.”
“These are all recommendations from people from vrbo?”
“Yep! I do also plan on taking a tour of the Guinness Storehouse for €13, Drimnagh Castle for €3.50, and checking out a few bars to see some local musicians. I took a world music class last fall semester and it got me interested in learning about more than just the uilleann pipes we learned about in class and from the book.”
“That does sound interesting. I’ve seen musicians playing something that looks like a squeezy set of bagpipes, is that what you’re talking about?”
“Yep! It’s a variation of Scottish bagpipes, and I personally think they’re way cooler than the Scottish pipes, but that’s probably just because of the lack of kilt on Irish players. I also heard that the Cobblestone has cool ‘trad’ music.”
“‘Trad’?”
“It means traditional. I saw someone use it when I looked up good local music on yelp.com. But the big thing I’m excited to experience in Ireland is Bloomsday.”
“Bloomsday?”
“Yeah, it’s based off of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. It’s celebrated every June 16th. That’s actually the main reason why I’m interested in going to Ireland right now. I was looking into studying abroad for a semester a few years back. My grades weren’t high enough to actually go, but I still looked into things for it. I talked to my favorite writing professor and he told me to check out Bloomsday, that sometimes Joyce fans will hold marathon readings of *Ulysses* that go on for like 30 hours. Actually, that’s one thing I’m really looking forward to in this trip. Actually... pages... 62 through... 69 of Fodor’s Ireland 2013 are completely full of things to do pertaining to writing, like a bunch of stuff about Jonathan Swift and Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats. And just so much Joyce!”
“Well, that’s awesome! It sounds like you’ve got a great trip planned!”
“I think I do!”
“Well, I hope to run into you in Dublin sometime in the next couple of weeks. Maybe we can get a beer and listen to some local music! My fiancé, his friend, and I are planning on partying hard. You should meet up with us!”
“Maybe go dancing?”
“Sounds great! It was lovely meeting you, have a nice flight!”
“You as well!”
Works Cited


False Democracy

By Hannah Armenta

Assignment Description: Respond to the following question: Is the United States a functioning democracy?

In America, political socialization starts from a young age. We are taught government is good, we should support and respect our leaders, we should love our country – and we do. We proudly would stand up every morning placing our right hand over our heart and recite our nation’s pledge from memory ending with, “... and to the Republic, for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” With our political socialization in mind, as we grow older we pride ourselves on living in a country that is full of freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom from oppression; the freedom to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But this begs the question, are we really as free as we think we are? After all, we live in a democracy, right? To some democracy and freedom are almost synonymous. We are free to live the life we want, therefore we must live in democracy. Despite having recited the Pledge of Allegiance hundreds of times over the course of our lifetimes, we fail to notice we are pledging to a republic, not a democracy. This small detail that we overlook is principal to the foundation of our government, because a democracy and a republic are two different things. In America we live in a constitutional republic that practices democratic theory, but forgoes completely upholding political equality, majority rule, and universal participation, therefore America cannot be called a democracy.

It’s important for Americans to realize the distinction between a republic and a democracy. To be put simply, a republic is one that is governed by law, whereas a democracy is one that is governed by majority rule. “A republic need not be a democracy, and this was fine with founders; at that time, democracy was associated with mob rule and instability.”[1] Our government was set up with the idea that we would self-govern within a given set of laws—otherwise known as our constitution. If we were a true democracy there would be no need for a constitution because all issues would be solved through majority rule which is why our founders were careful not to set up a democratic society. In one, if 50 percent plus one of people decided they wanted to take away someone’s life, liberty, or property, they could—no questions asked. There would be no laws set in place to prevent them from doing so.

So why have Americans grown up with the belief that we live in a democracy? Most likely because in our in the small part we play in the political process it feels like we do. We all get to vote, right? But here’s where it gets tricky. In both a democratic and republican society the people hold the power, however in a republic we choose to give up some of the power for the greater good of the group.[2] “The framers of the U.S. Constitution had their own conception of democracy. They instituted representative democracy, a system in which citizens participate in government by electing public officials to make government decision on
their behalf."[3] We vote for someone who then votes on issues for us. We just have to trust that the person we voted for will make the same decision we would have made. Voting in the presidential elections is merely an opportunity for the constituents to let the Electoral College know who they would like to win, but they do not get a direct say—the Electoral College does. “The idea was to take the risk out of democracy in a society where the majority of potential voters may not be sympathetic to the idea that government’s job was first and foremost to serve the needs of big businesses and the wealthy few.”[4]

Set up in Article II, Section I of the Constitution, the Electoral College is comprised of 100 votes from senators, 435 from representatives, and three extra votes provided by the Twenty-third Amendment for the District of Columbia with a grand total of 538 votes. According to the United States Census Bureau in 2012 there was an estimated 313,914,000 people living in the United States.[5] Isn’t majority rules supposed to be 50 percent plus one? 538 isn’t even a half, of a half of 313,914,000. Of that, 76.5 percent of the population is of voting age, meaning that in order for it to truly be a majority rules victory, a candidate would have to receive 240,144,242 votes.[6] That is a large gap from the 270 votes they need to win in the Electoral College. However, those numbers are based on every person who was eligible actually voting. Since the 1970s, the presidential vote has rarely gone over 70 percent while, “Most other elections are lucky to get 40 percent turnout, which means one can get elected governor of Virginia [...] or mayor of Chicago or countless other state and local offices with the votes of fewer than one in five voting-age adults.”[7] These numbers are scary, because after all, those are the people who are making decisions for us.

The genius behind the Constitution is our founders knew exactly what they were doing when they set it up. With a republic, they would be able to control the government, but in a way that made it feel like a better option than a monarchy to the people they were governing. The founder’s jaws would drop to the floor if they saw our voting system today. Women? Black people? Poor people? The uneducated? Anyone, so long as they have a valid state issued identification card? This is insanity! We all should just give up and let our state fall into a state of anarchy that is surely inevitable! How could we let people who are clearly unqualified make these important decisions? But here’s the key, we don’t. There is no universal participation, decisions are still being made by those in an elite category. “On average during the past four presidential elections, despite increasing low-income voter turnout, for every ten voters from the lowest income quintile there are sixteen votes in the highest income quintiles.”[8] Universal participation is impossible, because regardless of their political affiliation our government is run by a group of elites. “It is a game played by and for elites, where tangible issues of import can be in play. But it is a spectator event for others, who are seen by the elites as objects to be manipulated.”[9] Perhaps this fact is what will keep universal participation from ever happening.

The lower class isn’t oblivious to this either. “The evidence suggests that most people, especially working-class and poor people have no influence over politicians and policy so to the extent people understand their real status they will lose incentive to participate.”[10] As this gap continues to grow, the chance of there being any sort of political equality drops significantly. If the vast majority of the population fails to act on one of our most
basic rights then where will our state be ten, twenty, or thirty years down the line? Will our government morph into an oligopoly where decisions are made and we don’t even get a chance to voice how we feel? At least in a republic there is a chance for our voice to be heard. “Because voting is the most common way citizens can voice their opinions and exert control over the government.”[11] Whether that voice acts as a scream or a whisper is up to the politician making the decision. It’s clear that having a democratic society where there is majority rule, universal participation, and political equality is nice in theory, but in practice would make a highly un-functional, unstable governing system that is bordering on Socialism, social conservatives have even more incentive to ensure that we keep democracy as much out our system as we can. “Paul Weyrich, [...] one of the greatest organizers of the corporate right since the 1970s, put it bluntly in a 1980 speech to conservative activists, ‘I don’t want everybody to vote... our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.’”[12] If everyone were to vote along with the majority of their given socioeconomic class, a large portion of the country would be voting Democrat, and “With voting equalized across class lines, Democrats would likely have dominant, possibly veto-proof, majorities in congress.”[13] Even if the roles were reversed, having a system that is so heavily controlled by one political party is detrimental to the functioning of our society be it Republican or Democrat. We would actually be able to accomplish something in a timely manner with little or no debate? The idea is ludicrous for even the best of all ideas and policies have to be debated to find the flaws. Herein lies the genius of the Constitution.

By setting up a republic system where there was little political equality, majority rule, and universal participation, our founders were able to ensure that their positions are safe from the control of the majority. But, since that fateful summer of 1787, there have been many changes made to push our government into a democratic society. “The constitution, however it has been bent and twisted, still maintains a fundamental structure that provides a foundation for government.”[14] Despite the majority of American people believing that we will in a democratic society, we never have, and we probably never will. Every morning the children of America will still stand up and declare their allegiance to their “republic, for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” So long as you have a valid state issued identification card.
Bibliography


[2] Ibid., 56.


[6] Ibid.


[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10] Ibid., 22.
Finding Meaning In Life

By Jason Nalley

Assignment Description: Consider Nozick’s philosophy regarding the meaning of life. Nozick dismisses claims that life is meaningful due to God. What does he suggest makes life meaningful instead? Then consider Kierkegaard’s philosophy regarding death. Both thinkers suggest that transcendence is what makes life meaningful. Are their claims complimentary or contradictory? How so? Fully support your answer.

A common feature of the human race is the ability to rationally think about the world. Barring any mental handicap, we are able use this ability to think about all of the wondrous things that exist, including ourselves. We search for and assign meaning to our observations. In the following, I will explore the path to meaning presented by Soren Kierkegaard and Robert Nozick and how despite differing terminology they come to a similar conclusion on how we transcend our finitude and establish our meaning in the world – with the help of a little girl Annie. I will also explain how Kierkegaard, despite his Christian faith, would agree that Nozick’s conception of a relationship with God would indeed be a path leading away from transcendence.

1. – Annie

At the start of my exploration, Annie is a very inquisitive young girl. She observes the world around her, learning everything she possibly can. By observing parents, siblings, grandparents, pets, and friends in childhood, she will begin to see these others as different from her own self. They are all able to act on the world totally independent of her thoughts. Everyone is different from her, but she is also able to act on the world in a similar manner. She can draw, sing, laugh, and build, just like the others in her life. She is a self among many selves. She once observed that her brother can feel pain when he crashes his bike; she imagined this must be similar to pain she had experienced from trying to jump the space between the sofa and recliner in the living room.

One morning, Annie found her goldfish Orange floating in the fishbowl. Her mother told her that Orange died and would not be able to stay in her room anymore. A funeral was held in the backyard, after which they took a trip to the pet store to get a new goldfish. Annie thought that dying must certainly be something that happens only to pets and also means that a new pet will come in its place. It seemed to make sense – that must be what happened to the neighbor’s dog, since they got a new one – until a few months later when Annie’s grandmother died. She asks her mom when grandma will be able to come back new, and this is when Annie begins to learn that death means not coming back. At this point she comprehends that she is different from these others, but similar enough that whatever happens to them can also happen to her. Annie can and will die.

2. – Soren Kierkegaard

The questions that Annie will ask of herself and those around her on the subject of death are similar to those explored by
Christian Existentialist Soren Kierkegaard. In his ontological exploration, an exploration of being and existing in the world (Barry 55), Kierkegaard looks into the dual existence of human nature as both object and subject. Annie, at a very young age, was able to see others as different from her. She was one among many. She knew that, since her grandmother died, she too would die. This objective view allows her to come to the realization that everyone she knows will also die (59).

From the finitude of a limited lifetime, Annie may feel compelled to look for further meaning as she grows. She has her own preferences and reactions to the events in the world around her. She is her own person, special and unique. But how can it be that she will die just as everyone else will? What does that say for her experience of life? There has to be something more.

Kierkegaard is said to agree with a philosopher named Otto Rank in his observations that we as humans search for a means of attaining immortality as an escape from finitude. “Rank saw humans as driven by a need for cosmic significance – a need to transcend their finiteness and attain some kind of immortality. We have a need to feel that life matters, that we are both special and a part of something larger and more encompassing. Traditionally, this need to feel ‘heroic’ was met by religion” (57). Like all of us, Annie wishes to be something more than just a body that lives for a time and dies. The event that is life, her life, must be more than just a short stay on the third planet orbiting a sun.

It is a part of the human condition to question why we cannot control our death while so much else in our lives is within our control. Annie, once realizing that her life is in her own hands, will also find that death escapes her control. According to Kierkegaard, the anxiety and dread we feel when trying to choose what to do with this life is a predicament he calls “the dizziness of freedom” (Barry 57). This is a key aspect to our transcendence.

Upon realizing that her life, however short or long it may be, is largely under her control, the adult Annie may choose to deny death and try to defeat it. This is a possible choice that can be made out of the anxiety of freedom. Her grandmother, despite dying so long ago, lives on in memories and achievements. By denying the end of life as an end of self, Annie may feel that she can achieve immortality through a legacy of some sort. She could bury herself in her work, triple her baking efforts for church bake sales, and join all of the well-known charity organizations in her town in an effort to leave her mark on the world, and avoid thinking about that pesky little thing called death. Her death, after all, is of no more consequence than anyone else’s, but the life that remains in the memories of others will be quite impressive (59).

This is the path away from the transcendence we desire. According to Kierkegaard, this avoidance of a personal realization of death deludes us into thinking that we have defeated death when we have merely avoided thinking about it. Instead of thinking of death as something that happens to everyone, we have to realize that it is a personal experience.

As such, Annie may elect to look inward and realize that death will happen to her, as a subjective experience. In living authentically through the acceptance of her personal finitude, she would choose to live her life in a way that encourages growth.
through enriching experiences. She may well take on active roles in her work, church, and charity organizations, but her motivations and what she gets out of doing such things would be totally different. These activities of an authentic life would be a representation of her passions. By focusing her actions on growth, she will shed the selfish desire to leave a mark and instead form relationships that allow her to reach even further than her life could on its own. By connecting with others, her life becomes the lives of everyone she cares about and who cares about her. This web of lives is a transcendence of finite existence, sharing the experience of life made infinite by the diversity of relationships held, as well as those that could potentially be held. This web, for Kierkegaard, would eventually lead to a very personal relationship with God as an infinite being himself (Barry 60).

3. – Robert Nozick

Nozick also felt that meaning in life is found through transcendence. He claimed that the obstacles preventing us from achieving this were the limits we impose on our lives. A greater sense of meaning would be achieved from a more broad conception of life.

A narrow life could be lived in two ways. The first was a totally disintegrated life. Here, life is led from moment to moment with no continuity in action. Everything is experienced at a whim, with no goals or intention in mind. There is no unity in the activities engaged, and as a result, no unity to the person (Nozick 81). Here the self-imposed narrow limits are more easily seen. This type of individual will lead a life that occurs in finite, disparate chunks that can never be more meaningful than they are in the moments that they are observed.

A narrow life can also be led through well-integrated goals and plans that have a definite purpose in mind. Despite this unity of action, having the goals and purpose apply only to the self puts in place narrowing limits. This is akin to Annie’s goal to leave a legacy. While her life was very well structured and ambitious, she did not concern herself with anything that moved beyond her legacy (Nozick 81).

Nozick likened the creation of meaning in our lives to the way we create meaning for objects. The meaning we assign to things arises from the connections we create between different ideas. A narrow definition of an object’s existence says nothing about what it means to be that object; meaning is found within the intermingling of the ideas. “The phrase ‘the meaning you give to your life’ refers to the ways you choose to transcend your limits, the particular package and pattern of external connections you successfully choose to exhibit” (81). By living life in a way that connects with others, meaning will arise. Those limits that are transcended become part of the meaning, in that they are no longer a constricting factor. This allows you to act on the world in total freedom, in accordance with how you perceive yourself. Passions can be expressed freely, allowing you to connect with others who share in those passions. This connection with others allows you to transcend your finitude by becoming a part of something more than yourself, much like Annie and the charity work she engaged in because she believed in the cause as part of her authentic life (82). The broader your web of connections, the more meaningful your life is.
4. - Kierkegaard Would Agree With Nozick on His Concept of God

As can be seen above, finding meaning in life is similar for Kierkegaard as with Nozick. A narrow life, as explained by Nozick, is similar to the selfish, inauthentic life that results from an objective view of death, as presented by Kierkegaard. Living authentically by making death and life a more personally enriching experience would give way to the annihilation of limiting thoughts and beliefs. It is from this agreement that I feel Kierkegaard would agree that Nozick’s conception of a relationship with God is limiting and therefore an obstacle to the meaningful relationships that result of authentic living.

For Kierkegaard, the subjective outlook on the meaningful web of relationships is what also made the relationship with a divine being (God) a factor of transcendence. In living a connected life with others and discovering the far-reaching effect of your actions on the world, you become infinite. Every choice you make must be one that you authentically believe is the best for all, because acting on these choices is what creates the world we know.

Nozick saw a relationship with God as being part of His Plan. He only looked at a very objective relationship with God when he dismissed a connection with the divine as transcending. To be part of God’s Plan, under Nozick’s conception, is to say that you personally possess a part in the grand scheme of things that is separate from others and specially tailored just for you (Nozick 74).

Kierkegaard would agree with Nozick in that transcendence and meaning cannot be

found in a relationship that is confining and selfish by definition. Nozick himself said, “The problem of meaning is created by limits, by being just this, by being merely this” (82). Also, by revealing his narrow idea of God, Nozick has revealed to us a personal limiting factor that is preventing his own transcendence.

This is something the inauthentically living Annie could have experienced while trying to leave her mark at her local church. She may have felt that God wanted her alone to raise the most money from bake sales, and by doing so, she was fulfilling her purpose. She created a limit for herself by making her relationship with God nothing more than raising money for the church.

5. - Conclusion

We have the freedom to make our lives whatever we wish. While I know that I will die, and you know that you will die, the advice of Kierkegaard and Nozick should help us put that fact in better perspective. We live for ourselves and for the rest of the world. We should not allow the uncertain limitations of our time on Earth prevent us from living the most authentic that life we can.
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The Striking Contrast between the Characters Happy and Biff Loman and Bernard

By Jodi Kann

Assignment Description: A reading response on Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman.

By conducting a close character analysis in Arthur Miller’s tragic play Death of a Salesman, the reader can quite plainly see the differences in character traits, values, and ethics between Happy and Biff Loman, and Charley’s son Bernard, who are products of different parenting styles and philosophies. Happy and Biff Loman’s father, Willy Loman, is a complex character; he is ambitious and hard-working; he is constantly striving to obtain his edge in the sales market in order to obtain the American dream; he is also outgoing, funny, caring, manly, and a dedicated father and family man. Yet, he is cranky, crass, rude, pessimistic, womanizing, and is failing as a salesman, husband, and father since his values and philosophies are focused in the wrong direction. Willy is more concerned with popularity and financial success than with loftier virtues, such as integrity, compassion, cooperation, and community. In contrast, their neighbor Charley is an honest, ethical, humble, hard-working, and successful businessman. He is also a caring, compassionate, supportive, loyal and dedicated friend, husband, and father. Even further, Charley is not concerned with being physically fit and attractive, fun, and well-liked; he is more concerned about family, education, stability, loyalty, and integrity.

Throughout the play, Biff Loman portrays some of his father’s personal characteristics and values. He is hard-working, funny, outgoing, and manly. However, he is also cranky, irritable, and dishonest, which is quite apparent since he is a thief. Increasingly, Biff is very unhappy with his life since he has become disillusioned with the distorted ethics of the highly competitive business world and the American dream, much like his father Willy. This is evident when Biff states, “Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it’s a measly manner of existence... To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to get ahead of the next fella. And still – that’s how you build a future” (Miller 244). Biff’s statements reflect the distorted business practices and values of the American rat race that Willy upheld for quite a long time. Fortunately for Biff, he is young enough to see the error of his ways and has plenty of time to correct them by pursuing a more ethical career path for which he would be better suited, like running his own ranch out West or promoting a sporting goods store with Happy.

Throughout the play, Miller infuses many of Willy Loman’s personality traits and philosophies onto the character of Happy Loman as well. Although Happy appears to be quite jovial, popular, hard-working, law-abiding, manly, and womanizing, he is also lazy, unambitious, and unlike his name, is very dissatisfied with himself and the American dream. This is evident when Happy describes how even though his boss has obtained a higher
position and salary, he still is not happy. For example, Happy states, “And suppose I get to be a merchandise manager? He’s a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he’s building another one. And I know that’s just what I would do. I don’t know what the hell I’m workin’ for” (245).

Despite the fact that Happy realizes the pitfalls of these widely held American ideals, he still cannot shake the superficial ideal that status and power are more important than other more worthy ideals. For instance, although Happy is aware that “everyone around me is so false that I’m constantly lowering my ideals,” he still cannot abandon Willy’s ideals and wants to “show some of those pompous, self-important executives over there that Hap Loman can make the grade. I want to walk into the store the way he walks in” (245-246). Fortunately for Happy, he too is young enough to be able to redeem his mistakes and pursue a more honest, ethical, and fulfilling life.

Conversely, throughout the play Miller imbues the character of Bernard with loftier ideals that reflect Charley’s principles and philosophies. Unlike Biff and Happy, Bernard knows and upholds the virtues of education, diligence, loyalty, and integrity. Bernard, therefore, is living a much more fulfilled life of which he can be proud. A good example of Bernard’s great sense of ethics is when he offers to help Biff study for his state Regents math exam since he knows the importance of a good education. However, Bernard refuses to take the test for Biff because, “That’s a state exam! They’re liable to arrest me!” (253). Here, Bernard is displaying his compassion for and loyalty to Biff, yet he will not compromise his ethics.

After the exposure of Biff’s failure to study and other dastardly deeds, like stealing a football from school and being too rough with the girls, Biff drives off in Willy’s car without having a license. He does this in order to avoid the punishment that Willy has been too lax in doling out. Bernard quickly alerts Willy to the problem by exclaiming, “He’s driving the car without a license!” (253). Because Bernard understands the potential liability of Biff’s actions, he once again steps in to help his friend’s family despite the fact that they make fun of him and treat him badly. Nonetheless, due to his father’s positive influence and guidance, Bernard has become a successful lawyer and is living more of the American dream than Biff, Happy, or Willy, and has not had to compromise his ethics to do it. Thus, he is rewarded by getting to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court and quite humbly accepts Charley and Willy’s praise when Charley brags about him to Willy (281).

Through the use of characterization, Miller has expertly demonstrated the positive and negative effects of different parenting styles and philosophies upon their children. Much to their misfortune, Biff and Happy have adopted many of Willy’s priorities and values, which have led to their aimless, unsettled, and unfulfilled lives. Biff is unable to choose a nobler career path, and is a liar and a thief. Happy is preoccupied with socioeconomic status, wealth, prestige, and with being a popular womanizer. On the other hand, Bernard reaped the benefits of adopting Charley’s principles and ethics and is leading a much more productive and fulfilling life. Bernard is a successful and hard-working lawyer who is deeply concerned about the welfare of his clients and his community at large. Thus, through these characters, Miller’s ultimate message is delivered; Fathers and parents need to be very careful that the sins of the father are not
passed down to the son. However, pardon the pun; wherever there is a will, there is a way.

Works Cited

Why Martin Luther King, Jr. is an American Philosopher

By Alexander Braun

Assignment Description: This is an argumentative assignment; develop your own thesis and support that thesis in the essay. Your thesis should reflect an aspect of the course that interests you. You may draw inspiration and support for your thesis from the work of James, Royce, DuBois, or King.

Martin Luther King Jr. may not be the first name we think of when we think of great American philosophers, but he definitely belongs on a list along with the likes of James and Royce. King was as, if not more, influential than the already impressive names mentioned above. He isn’t without his own influences though. By reading his Letter from Birmingham Jail, it’s easy to see that many of the themes of James and Royce shine through the text. These themes include James’ belief that the truth is ever changing and his hypothesis about decision making, and Royce’s belief about the idealization of suffering and the perfection of the community. The echoing of these themes, whether intentional or not, is why I will argue that King can and should be considered an American philosopher.

King understood that for the white community in America what was true was that black people were not equal to white people, and as such, they did not deserve equal rights. King recognized, like many others, that the laws that stripped many black people of their basic rights were set in place by a white minority. They were imposed upon the black community by the white community without any consideration for whether or not they were good or worked for the black community. They lacked the pluralistic voice necessary to ensure that the laws were just for all. King wasn’t calling for a new type of legislation run completely by black people, he was only pleading that another point of view, one that wasn’t a white male’s, be present when laws were being created and amended. Allowing for at least a black voice to be heard during the legislative process would allow a chance for there to be a radical change in the law-making community. This in turn would cause many of the values that the law-making community once held to be changed for the better.

Evidence of James’ hypothesis about decision making is also present in King’s work. In James’ words his hypothesis was that “…pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally, are not the only thing that do produce our creeds.” (James 205). In our terms we can take this to mean that when we cannot make a decision based upon reason, intellect, and/or logic we must make one based upon our passions, that is, the beliefs and truths we hold dearest to us. In the work of King we can see this idea when he speaks about whether or not a law should be broken. When King’s fellow clergymen voice their disappointment in him for seemingly ignoring logic and reason, and willingly breaking laws he goes on to explain that many of the laws that he has broken are unjust laws. They are “…human law[s] that [are] not rooted in eternal and natural law” and they degrade human personality (King 542). While King knows what will come when he breaks these unjust laws, he also knows that much more is lost by listening to the clergymen’s calls to
reason. His passion for justice and equality led him to disregard “better judgment” and act not in his own self-interest, but in the interest of his community as a whole. Along with James, traces of the work of Josiah Royce can be found throughout King’s “Letter From Birmingham City Jail.”

Ever-present are Royce’s ideas about the idealization of sorrow, and that through suffering the community can move closer to perfection. Royce examined the role that sorrow plays in the life of man. When he speaks of sorrow, Royce says “…I here mean an experience of ill which is not wholly an experience of that which as you then and there believe ought to be simply driven out of existence” (Royce 1055). We can take this to mean that the sorrow we are speaking of is truly a terrible one, but it is not one that we wish would have never happened. Instead it is one that we can look back on, and recognize the good that came before it. It is one that allows us to develop into better human beings, so long as we properly idealize said sorrow.

In order to idealize a sorrow we must respond to a specific sorrow in a creative and constructive way, rather than completely destroy it. When we seek to destroy the sorrow, we seek to end everything good that made the sorrow so terrible upon its departure, and every possible good thing that could have followed. A very light example of this would be wishing a failed relationship to have never happened. If said relationship could indeed be erased not only would the crushing heartache that came as a result of its end be gone, but the feeling of falling in love in the first place would be erased as well. One possible solution to this dilemma is to reduce the chance of any possible breakup to zero by not avoiding a relationship of any kind. By choosing this path the failure of the relationship is indeed avoided, but a new sorrow emerges. This new sorrow then takes the place of the sorrow that never was. Dealing with the sorrow in a constructive way is only half of the formula to idealizing sorrow. In order to complete the process, we must also focus on one specific sorrow at a time. If we are not focused on the specific sorrow that currently haunts us, we will never truly escape it, and therefore we will never make any progress. Also, it is impossible to plan in advance for a certain sorrow. No one can know the future before it is the present, and by trying to do so we will inevitably create a sorrow that we could have never expected. Royce goes on to argue that because these criteria are so difficult to meet, truly idealizing sorrow and properly dealing with it is extremely rare and should be regarded as an act of genius. So what does it look like then when sorrow is properly idealized?

I believe that Royce would offer King as a prime example of sorrow idealized. King knew specifically which sorrow had to be dealt with. He knew that so long as black people in America were denied equal rights they would never be able to develop to their full potential. He knew not to let obstacles get in the way of his movement’s ultimate goal. It is also evident that MLK’s response was highly creative. Non-violent direct action was, and I believe it still is, something that most people faced with any sort of oppression would never think of. It also goes without saying that the results that followed from King’s actions were not anything other than constructive.

Royce’s second idea present in King’s work is that through suffering, the community moves ever closer to perfection. While this may sound very similar to Royce’s idealization of sorrow, know that it is not the same thing. The two are in fact related, but when speaking of sorrow, I was mainly speaking of how it pertained to King individually. In this case we see that the community as a whole is the main focus.
Royce states that when we suffer, so too does the community. Through this suffering, individuals within the community are able to escape their own narrowness of view and get a glimpse of the community as a whole. In doing so, said individuals become aware of the interconnectedness of themselves and other individuals within the community, and through this interconnectedness they are better able to empathize with others around them.

This idea of interconnectedness wasn’t lost on King. He goes on to say “I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” (King 539). King recognized that as long as even one person in his community was suffering the community as a whole was suffering, but through that suffering they were able to recognize that they were not alone and in fact belonged to a larger community. They were able step outside of their original, narrow field of view and get a glimpse of something bigger, and by doing so they were able to help move the community closer towards perfection by taking the actions necessary to overcome their sorrow. This idea can be expanded even further to include members of the white community who recognized that when the black community suffered, the American community as a whole suffered as well.

I feel that I have laid out enough evidence to suggest that not only are many of the themes of great American philosophers clearly present in the work of Martin Luther King Jr., but also that King belongs on that list himself. Whether it is because he pushed a nation to the negotiating table at a time when it seemed all hope was lost for an entire race’s civil rights, or because of his radical acts of
References


Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* follows the narrative of a young black man who operates within the realm of imagined and real struggles. He plods through life with the optimism of naïveté, and eventually, the bitterness of a recluse. Ellison’s nameless narrator tells the tale of one who represents many. This protagonist’s aims are those of upward mobility and leadership — his youthful haughtiness, tempered with deference to whites and ambition, mark him as the prototypical tragic hero. That none of his goals are truly realized is his tragedy, and his path towards failure is rife with manipulation which marks him as a victim. In truth, the nameless youth is only a victim because of the oppressive ideologies and false consciousness that dog his every step. His realization of these facts is his only redeeming quality. Ellison puts forth a character that experiences hardships, and learns lessons from them in order to illuminate his readers.

Ellison wants to paint a picture of the world that his readers can utilize in real life. By highlighting representatives of two separate, but similar ideological state apparatuses — aspects of the superstructure that the state depends upon (Althusser 452) — Ellison depicts very real concerns in his fiction. While much of the novel is mired in ambiguity, the conclusion makes its goal quite clear: “What else but try to tell you what was really happening when your eyes were looking through?” (Ellison 581). The question, then, is what is really happening? The conclusive answer is that oppression surrounds everyone in ways that are inconceivable by many. Ellison enlightens his readers with the “disappointing fact that the society which claims to be founded upon the principles of freedom and equality nonetheless supported a brutal chattel slave system for over two hundred years” (Yarborough 33), and also highlights several features of economic oppression rampant in American society.

Even though the nameless hero proclaims “life is to be lived, not controlled” (Ellison 577), ideological state apparatuses exercise their domination with the practiced ease of those who take their sovereignty for granted. Ellison’s young protagonist shines as a bright example of one who has unlimited opportunity: he is a gifted speaker, is insightful (17), and is ambitious (18). The reader’s first glimpse of his talents, and future hazards, comes when he encounters a microcosm of societal power in the first chapter. This scene features ten black youths selected to participate in a Battle Royal for the embodiment of oppressive American society he will struggle with throughout the narrative. The Battle Royal hinges on the entertainment of “the most important men of the town” (18), and gives the reader several clues regarding economic oppression at the whim of the “economically privileged” (Tyson 52). It is quite obvious to the reader that these ten black youths selected to fight are subjugated based on their race alone. The crucial cues, which are reinforced later in the novel, point out the depth of
oppressive ideologies in the American system and are brought to light in this scene.

The white leaders who summon young black men for their entertainment represent the superstructure: the social, political, and ideological components of society that are supported by the economic base of power (50). The religious, legal, and political delegates (Ellison 18) present at the Battle Royal are firmly within the bourgeoisie -- displaying their control of economic and human resources (Tyson 50). Ellison’s nameless hero, one of the ten young men taking part in the fight, believes he was invited to recite the speech he delivered at his high school commencement. This tragic hero’s excruciating display of naiveté shows that he is a representation of “the hero as victim” (Winther 115). He is a victim, along with nine others, of commodification.

The white leaders who organized the Battle Royal, in anticipation of the coming entertainment, are consuming beer, whiskey, and “black cigars” (Ellison 17). This consumption is telling in that even the literal objects they consume are black -- while they simultaneously objectify ten people without any qualms. Black objects are consumed, or observed in the case of the young men, for the pleasure of white men. By exercising their control and consuming these select commodities, these pillars of white society confer sign-exchange value on black objects, and people. Sign-exchange occurs when a commodity attaches a certain social status to its owner (Tyson 58). The literal consumption of the cigars displays the pervasive exploitation by white leaders, for the benefit of their peers.

In addition to the emblematic consumption by agents of ideological state apparatuses, the ten young men are forced to fight “blindfolded with broad bands of white cloth” (Ellison 21). Although the blindfolds simply appear to be another part of the entertainment, they represent much more. Part of the “manipulatory agencies” (Winther 115) that plague the proletariat is ideology itself. The ever-present ideology of the American Dream, the “myth [that] is firmly based on the widespread belief in the inherent justice of the U.S. economic system” (Yarborough 41) blinds those who are not in power. Such false consciousness, ideology functioning “to mask its own failure” (Tyson 55) simply perpetuates the current economic relationship. The blindfold is, so to speak, slipped over the eyes of the lower classes by white leaders. It is apparent to the reader that Ellison intends the message that the American Dream is a veil over all poor workers; the Dream is really only for whites, the veil is for blacks. These subtle interpretations of oppression -- through economic and political means--provide one with insight to Invisible Man’s true meaning.

After undergoing several incidents that lead the narrator from college expulsion, to termination of employment at Liberty Paint - - which is “representative of American industry at large” (Winther 117) -- he ends up unemployed and alone in New York City. Ellison’s hero is eventually taken in by Mary, a woman who allows him to board for nothing (Ellison 298). After a short time he is recruited by Brother Jack, a white man, to be a “spokesman for [his] people and...work in their interest” (293). All of the nameless narrator’s previous experience leads him to be wary of this white man, but he succumbs because of his debt to Mary. Despite the protagonist’s realization of “his own exploitation” (Yarborough 48), he is swept up into the grand, albeit, and unclear plans of the Brotherhood (Ellison 310).
Aside from the brisk treatment of the narrator by members of the Brotherhood -- indicating that they are accustomed to getting exactly what they want -- they overwhelm him with a party that takes place in the lap of luxury (300-01) and a large sum of money with the promise of a handsome weekly salary (310). In addition to the money, Brother Jack gives the narrator a new, still unknown to the reader, identity.

Providing members with new identities is the reader’s first clue that the Brotherhood is merely the “big town” version of those white leaders from the Battle Royal back home. Brother Jack personifies both political and ideological aspects of the ideological state apparatus (310-11), and Brother Hambro, the hero’s mentor, personifies the legal aspect of the same (357). The Brotherhood operates under the leadership of Jack and several other white men (472), while Hambro, who is also white, is one of their chief theoreticians. These white leaders comprise the “Committee” (362), acting as the governing body of the Brotherhood. It is no mistake that both the Committee and the white leaders present at the Battle Royal are the physical embodiment of ideological state apparatuses. Although the Committee enjoys a much more formal structure, and appears to demonstrate racial tolerance (292), there are many underlying similarities between the two groups.

Much like the overt commodification of the black community for their entertainment, the Committee is guilty of the same crime, although, for political maneuvering (503). That Ellison’s hero is issued a new identity (309) upon entering the Brotherhood likens him to a product being issued a serial number. Furthermore, at a meeting during which the Committee is chastising their employee, the narrator, for doing what he thought was his job, Brother Jack exclaims that “crowds are only our raw materials, one of the raw materials to be shaped by our program” (472). This outburst illustrates that the masses are not guided, or utilized for their use value, but for their exchange value. The exchange value they confer is cashed in at a later time for political “alliances” (502) to further the Brotherhood’s unknown aims. Even the nameless hero is subject to the same commodification when he is told that he was “not hired to think” (496). He is simply a disposable object, one that is not given the respect to express an opinion.

In addition to commodification, the Brotherhood is guilty of creating a false consciousness. Committee members go about criticizing the narrator’s first speech as a “Brother” by calling it unscientific (350), meaning it did not follow their unspecified ideology. Although the nameless Brother undergoes indoctrination, it is worth mentioning that all discussion of ideology within the Brotherhood remains vague. This ambiguity leads to tension between the Committee and Ellison’s hero. Tyson asserts that “theoretical ideas [or ideologies] can be judged to have value only in terms of their concrete applications...their applicability to the real world” (50). With this in mind, as well as the intended ambiguity of the Brotherhood’s true belief system, the reader is led to question how the Brotherhood’s dogma applies to the real world. The veiled nature of their ideology creates no clear goals, leaving it to be an ideal with the sole purpose of masking its own failure: i.e. false consciousness. If the Committee represents an ideological state apparatus, a construct being supported by the economic base, then they are just putting a new face on the “crummy lie [society] kept [the masses] dominated by” (Ellison 510). The recrimination inherent in this logic is that the Committee is simply the Northern
version of the Southern group that hosted the Battle Royal.

By drawing upon this parallel that Ellison put forth, one can see the goal of *Invisible Man*. The connection of repressive state apparatuses informs readers that economic oppression of African-Americans is not only a Southern "tradition." The pervasive oppression revolving around the false consciousness and of the American Dream does not only affect members of a specific race, rather it affects members of a specific socioeconomic class.

Ellison’s portrayal of “the hero as victim” (Winther 115) coupled with the fact that his hero is nameless, allowing him to symbolize “everyman” provides a cautionary tale for the reader. It is a hopeful message, that the victimized narrator, “because he has suffered and transcended that suffering, he has become a more human and humane American” (Trimmer 49). It is asserted that this is a hopeful message because, after all, the traumatized narrator is dictating his story directly to the reader, to be aware at the outset rather than learning his same lessons through similar hardship.

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**Works Cited**


Hull-House Depicted as the Absolute

By LaRinda Johnson

Assignment Description: This is an argumentative assignment; you will develop your own thesis and support that thesis in the essay. You must include a minimum of four supporting premises. You must use the philosophy of John Dewey and/or Jane Addams in the essay.

In this paper I will analyze Jane Addams’ essay, “The Devil Baby at Hull-House,” through the lens of Josiah Royce’s philosophical theory of the Absolute: The universe functions as a single organism, with a single consciousness, and shares in the same ultimate goal and suffering. Hull-House is a sample of the Absolute, and experiences this world as the Absolute does. The Devil Baby rumored to reside at Hull-House represents the shared suffering and consciousness of the Absolute. Both the Absolute and Hull-House have an ultimate goal to live an ideal life in an ideal world. The Absolute and Hull-house, though made up of individuals, have a self-consciousness that wants to perfect itself. It is because of the shared consciousness that when one part of the Absolute suffers, the absolute as a whole suffers, as does Hull-House.

Meaning, for an entire world to be ideal, all the individuals within it must also be living the ideal life with self-possession, unity, peace, and spiritual power. Only then can the world claim the victory of reaching its ultimate goal.

For all individuals to be living an ideal world, the universe must be at peace, unified, and free of oppression. If there were to be turmoil (suffering) in any corner of the universe, the ultimate goal of an ideal world would not be attained. It is this idea of a common goal that makes the idea of the Absolute plausible. Royce, in his essay “The Problem of Job” defines his idea of the Absolute:

The idealist maintains that there is in the universe but one perfectly real being, namely the Absolute, that the Absolute is self-conscious, and that his world is essentially in its wholeness the fulfillment in the act of an all perfect ideal. We exist ourselves as fragments of the absolute life, or better, as partial functions in the unity of the absolute are not illusory, but are what they are in organic unity with the whole life of the Absolute Being (845).

The “perfectly real being,” the Absolute, is the Universe and everything in it, functioning as a single, self-conscious organism. Humans exist as “partial functions” within the absolute. Just as humans are individual organisms with many parts working together to make the body function, the Absolute is one organism and

The Absolute

In the tradition of Aristotle, Josiah Royce believes that human beings have a telos; we are working toward an end, and have an ultimate goal of living the best life possible. Humans as individuals have different needs and concerns, but are all working toward the same end; to live the ideal life in an ideal world. Royce writes, “That is our Goal: Self-possession, unity, peace, and spiritual power through and yet beyond all the turmoil of life—the victory that overcometh the world” (Royce 1019). The idea of an ideal world would have to include everything in it to be ideal.
humans are among the parts that work together to make it function properly. As individuals we are fragments; together we are the Absolute Being.

Royce refers to the Absolute Being as God, in that the Absolute has the qualities that are typically used to define God. The Absolute is infinite, perfectly real, and beyond anything that is human. The Absolute has a consciousness that wants to perfect itself. If the Absolute is akin to God, and we are a part of the Absolute, then we are a part of God. If we are a part of God, then whatever we feel, God feels. So, God feels our joy and our suffering. If we are all a part of God, and God suffers when we suffer, then we suffer when each other is suffering. Additionally, no one in this world is immune to suffering; we have all experienced suffering at some point in our lives, so we can be aware of the suffering of others.

For one to know that there is suffering in the world, even if not directly involved in it, is suffering itself. Suffering of an individual or group is transmuted into absolute suffering. “When you suffer, your sufferings are God's sufferings...identically his own personal woe” (Royce 843). Since the Absolute is of one consciousness, when one part suffers the entire absolute suffers. The suffering of an individual is transmuted into absolute suffering. Meaning, when those around us suffer, we vicariously suffer through them; we share in their pain and sorrow.

John Dewey claims that, “experience and thought are [not] antithetical terms” (61). Meaning that there is continuity between thought and experience. If there is continuity between thought and experience, then Royce would have had to experience his own theory. Since we do not have an account of how Royce may have experienced his idea of the Absolute, we have to find a way to test his theory. Jane Addams gives an account of an experience she had at Hull-House, which I use as a test sample of the Absolute.

Hull-House

Hull-House was a social settlement that opened in Chicago in 1889. Co-founders, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates, opened Hull-House with a goal of offering art and literary education to their less fortunate neighbors. Hull-House began to evolve in attempt to meet all the needs of its surrounding neighbors. Not only did they expand on the types of education offered, but it also became a place where those in the surrounding community could get other services as well. Hull-House began to offer childcare, and other services that filled needs within in the community. Hull-House was constantly evolving to meet the needs of the people it served (Hull-House Museum).

The women who opened Hull-House and those who the Hull-House served were in pursuit of a common ultimate goal; to make the world around them a more ideal place to live in. Just as Royce says all of the individuals within the absolute have a shared goal, so did those who inhabited Hull-House. Addams and Gates saw that the world was not ideal, and set out to improve it. Those who were served by Hull-House were seeking a more ideal life and believed the services they were receiving would help them obtain it. Hull-House represents the unified goal of the Absolute—to improve and perfect the world.

Hull-House, like the Absolute, was filled with individuals with individual needs and concerns, and the house evolved into a place that could meet as many needs as possible.
All of the individuals involved, from its founders to those it served, were all pieces that made Hull-House whole. Separately they were fragments, partial functions; together they were one, sharing in a single consciousness, with one ultimate goal.

Not only was Hull-House known for offering services to the less fortunate in the community, it was also a place for individuals to find companionship when trying to cope with their surroundings (Hull-House Museum). The social environment allowed for a kind of social therapy through companionship. Therapy was not a service Hull-House set out to give. The companionship people found was an organic unplanned occurrence. One day this social therapy transmuted into the tale of the Devil Baby that was rumored to occupy Hull-House.

The origin of the rumor is not known, and there are many different versions of how this Devil Baby came to be. However, all the tales held a common theme: The cloven child was born to a mother undeserving of punishment, for the actions of ungodly, or abusive husbands. Those whom the tale of the Devil Baby had the most power over held the same common theme in their own lives: women who had done nothing to deserve ill treatment from their husbands and children (Addams 10).

The tale of the Devil Baby brought many women to Hull-House that were victims of tragic and oppressive experiences within their own families. The Devil Baby was a manifestation of all the suffering these women felt, and represented the same thing to all the suffering women. The women could see where the Devil Baby could fit into their own lives, as though they had all been punished with a Devil Baby. Even Addams felt as though she was experiencing the Devil Baby, "the Devil Baby seemed to occupy every room at Hull-House..." (Addams 10). The Devil Baby, though merely a rumor, had been given life by shared suffering. Many of the women who came to get a glimpse of it, had experienced the very things rumored to have given reason for the Devil Baby's existence.

Addams was able to see, through the Devil Baby, that the women around her were suffering. She writes, "With an understanding quickened perhaps through my own acquaintance with the mysterious child, I listened to tragic tales from the visiting women" (7). She began to understand why the women wanted so badly to confirm the existence of the Devil Baby. The women related to this tale, and were seeking some sort of confirmation that they were not alone in their suffering. Though the Devil Baby did not exist, these women with common plights were brought together by it.

It is because Hull-House functioned as the Absolute does that the emotions going on inside it affected everyone within it, and when one suffered the house as a whole suffered. Addams writes, "We had doubtless struck a case of what psychologists call the 'contagion of emotion,' added to that 'aesthetic sociability,' which impels any one of us to drag the entire household to the window when a procession comes into the street or a rainbow appears in the sky" (2). Since Addams was in such close quarters with the women who were flocking to Hull-House, their emotions were becoming contagious. She was not only drawn to the women who were telling their sorrowful tales, she was also able to understand their sufferings. If she was able to understand their sufferings, she must have been able to relate to them in some way through suffering.
It is because emotion is contagious that suffering of an individual within the absolute, is felt by the absolute. “For human society as it now is, in this world of care, is a chaos of needs; and the whole social order groans and travails together in pain until now longing for salvation” (Royce 1037). The salvation Royce is referring to here, is the end that the Absolute and Hull-House are striving for—the ideal life in an ideal world. The groaning and travailing together in pain is what happens when there is suffering in the Absolute. The Absolute, which includes all its parts, feels the pain and the “partial functions” must work together to find a way to subside the pain.

Hull-House was created as a way to make the world a more ideal place for these women to live. It was intended to help give those in need a chance to make a better life for themselves, and an attempt to make the world a more ideal place to be. It was doing this before the Devil Baby ever appeared, but maybe that is why the tale needed to be spun. Hull-House was doing good things to make the world a better place, but the news of the Devil Baby brought in more women who may have never stepped into Hull-House had it not been for the tale. It was as if the tale was a calling to those who were suffering, because their suffering could be eased there.

Hull-House is a fitting sample to test Royce’s theory of the Absolute. The Absolute is composed of the entire universe, and as individuals we are each such a small piece of it that is may be difficult to fathom it as a single organism with a shared consciousness. So, Hull-House can be viewed as a sample of the Absolute, for Hull-House is a group that can represent any part of the world at any moment. Addams writes,

If it has always been the mission of literature to translate the particular act into something of the universal, to reduce the element of crude pain in the isolated experience by bringing to the sufferer a realization that his is but the common lot, this mission may have been performed through such stories as this for simple hard-working women, who, after all, at any given moment compose the bulk of the women in the world (10). Addams is suggesting that the tale of the Devil Baby made what the particulars (individuals) experience into what humans, or more specifically women in this case, experience universally. It was transforming their pain and suffering into something that is universal and shared that offered some comfort. They were able to find comfort in sharing their stories of suffering with each other, and the suffering became something they all experienced. Their shared experiences and sufferings made them function as a single organism with a shared consciousness—The Absolute.
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