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Noēsis

[nō′ēsəs]
In Greek philosophy, the knowledge that results from
the operations of *nous*: the mind, reason, intellectual faculty.

Editor's Letter

It bears beginning with the customary "unprecedented year" remark that we are now all too familiar with. This is the first—and hopefully last—edition of Noēsis conceived, developed, and published during a global pandemic. It has been a challenging year for all and in light of this we are all the more proud of what our incredible team has done in this volume of the journal.

One of the most exciting developments to the journal this year has been the launch of our first ever online zine, ē. Senior editor Kwesi Thomas gets complete credit for taking up and executing the project as ē's Editor-in-Chief. We thank him profoundly for this addition to Noēsis. We also thank Hootan Ghaffarisaravi, who worked with Kwesi on the project, designing the incredible website. The zine takes digital error as its theme, featuring creative and philosophical pieces from students across Canada reflecting on lockdown, climate change, social media, and even God itself. It is a gorgeous and exceptionally well curated piece of work and we encourage you to read it at www.noesisjournal.com/e/ .

We take as something of a theme for this volume the diversity of philosophical method represented in the papers we have published. We hope that in reading through them you can consider not only the ideas presented in each individually, but the tension that develops between each paper's differing methodological and metaphilosophical approach.

We begin with a striking paper from Tsitsi Macherera: "The Role of Dignity in Social Justice Movements." The paper explores the rhetorical ends to which the concept of dignity has been used (and misused) and asks in light of this whether it is or can be a useful concept for social justice movements. Macherera argues that the concept can and ought to be employed in our socially ameliorative projects, and presents the conditions for its meaningful use.

We turn then to Tobias Sandoval's "Against Mind Uploading Optimism: The Argument from Locational Indeterminacy." Sandoval argues skillfully in this paper against the possibility 'mind uploading'—uploading human minds into computer systems. His argument is from locational indeterminacy: because we cannot account for the determinate location of a person in the process of gradual upload, we should doubt whether a person could survive such an upload.

Our next paper is from Devin Mutic, titled "Extending David Hume's Analogical Argument for Nonhuman Animal Minds to Plants." Mutic brings together, fascinatingly, the history of philosophy with contemporary research in plant behaviour to argue that if we take Hume's theory of mind to be plausible, then we have reason to take plant mindedness to be similarly plausible.

We end on a reflexive note with William (Xiafangzhou) Chao's "The Possibility of Philosophical Assertion." Chao argues here against skepticism about philosophical assertion. That is, he argues that despite not seeming to have justified

beliefs—let alone knowledge—of their philosophical positions, philosophers can still meet a norm of assertion. He argues that a collective recognition of systematic peer disagreement gives philosophers license to *pretend* to make assertions, without violating the knowledge norm.

This is an exceptionally rich and provoking set of papers and we hope that you'll enjoy them as much as we have. We thank all of our authors for their work and patience through the process, particularly given the added difficulties of the year.

Our most profound thanks, as always, are with our editorial team. This journal is the product of their efforts and we cannot overstate how much we appreciate their hard work this year.

There are a series of other people and supports without whom the journal would not be possible. First and foremost, the support of the Department of Philosophy. In particular, the support and guidance of Eric Correia, Undergraduate Administrator, and chair Martin Pickavé. We also thank University College, Innis College, and the Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU) for additional financial support, without which we would be unable to maintain and publish the journal. Our thanks as well to Jesse Knight for his typesetting wizardry, and to Yalda Safar Ali and Tina Siassi from Alier Studio for designing our beautiful cover.

Finally, our thanks to you, our readers, whose curiosity, passion, and interest in the philosophical work of undergraduate students is our *raison d'être*.

Sincerely,

Yazmeen Martens & Sanghoon Oh

Editors-in-Chief, Noēsis

Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy, University of Toronto

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THE ROLE OF DIGNITY IN SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

Tsitsi Macherera, *University of Toronto* *

Is dignity useful? This paper examines established conceptions of dignity and their rhetorical outcomes. Through consideration of these conceptions as provided by Michael Rosen—*dignity as status, dignity as behavior and dignity as intrinsic*—this paper asks whether groups in contention with the state and other elite institutions can effectively use dignity as a means of recognizing their oppressive conditions and mobilizing against them. I conclude that dignity can be effectively used by groups seeking social change. However, groups must be purposeful and concrete in their deployment of dignity, emphasizing its service of a particular project. This third conception, dignity as intrinsic, allows groups to do this work. This work involves (1) pragmatizing dignity by attaching it to concrete goals like the securement of rights and resources and (2) using dignity to critique rather than appeal to the state and other elite institutions.

Keywords: dignity · dignity as intrinsic · social justice

Dignity is a commonplace in our shared discourses around justice. From constitutional frameworks to protest pamphlets on the streets of Chile, dignity is presented as a fundamental human value. Consequently, identifying how dignity is defined, used, and interpreted is an important social inquiry. Most of the existing literature has primarily focused on dignity as it relates to individuals or groups seeking recognition from traditional sources of authority. A smaller subset of work has aimed to expand this scope, exploring dignity's utility beyond this demand. I am interested in continuing this latter project by exploring whether dignity is rhetorically useful to social justice movements in contention with the state. Through a description of the three main conceptions of dignity—dignity as status, dignity as behaviour and dignity as intrinsic[1]—and a discussion of the rhetorical advantages and disadvantages that dignity imposes on social justice movements, I will argue that dignity is crucial in discourses of social justice. However, for this value to appear, dignity must be reclaimed, renegotiated, and put towards a concrete and tangible end. This third conception of dignity, dignity as intrinsic, allows groups to pursue this end.

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[1]Rosen, p. 16.

The objective of this essay is to determine whether dignity is rhetorically meaningful to social movements. Rhetorically meaningful in the sense that it advances the movement in some non-trivial way. For example, successfully recruiting participants or helping articulate the shared condition of its members.

This project presents technical roadblocks that must be addressed. The first issue is that social movements are incredibly diverse. They take on different forms, issues, sizes, and a host of other variants that complicate the task of presenting a singular definition. For the purposes of this essay, a social movement will be defined as the mobilization of a group in direct contestation with the state or other coercive power. Furthermore, an important criterion is that the movement must have some form of abolitionist aims, which go beyond discontent about a particular state policy or action. These sorts of movements require groups to form an oppositional definition of dignity, one which counters rather than elicits state approval. To begin, we must discuss what these definitions are and how they are deployed.

I. Defining Dignity

The concept of dignity has gone through several evolutions taking on various meanings and purposes depending on when, where, and how it has been invoked. Consequently, it is important to understand the different epistemological spheres in which dignity appears and how these spheres result in different interpretations. Though dignity is notorious for its inability to be concretely defined, there are some established conceptions that effectively serve the purposes of this essay. As explored in Michael Rosen's book *Dignity*, these conceptions include dignity as a status, dignity as behaviour, and dignity as an intrinsic quality.[2] *Dignity as status* is used to emphasize a thing's perceived or prescribed importance. The term traditionally maps on to elite entities, groups, or individuals and is used to signify and uphold class distinctions.[3] *Dignity as behaviour* is employed in a similar vein. This conception asserts that there are certain moral and social actions that individuals must abide by to earn their dignity.[4] Dignity as behaviour aims to set the parameters of acceptable moral and social actions. Many are critical of dignity's use as a behavioural descriptor, seeing it as means of moral regulation and social control. Fredrich Schiller describes dignity as "tranquility in suffering," arguing that it illusions and patronizes the working class by celebrating behaviours that mark their ability to endure state and bourgeois abuse.[5] Analyzing the power dynamics inherent to dignity as status and dignity as behaviour is vital to an understanding of how dignity inhibits the class consciousness necessary for the mobilization of social movements. However, strangely enough, dignity has also been conceptualized as having an opposite impact. *Dignity as intrinsic* conceives of dignity as an inherent trait belonging to all humankind.[6] Dignity as intrinsic upholds the belief that

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[2] Rosen, p. 16.
[3] Ibid., pp. 11–13.
[4] Ibid., pp. 6, 30.
[5] Ibid., p. 31.
[6] Ibid.

dignity stems from personhood, not any sort of earned merit. Dignity is used to articulate the abstract and often transcendent idea of a shared humanity, the belief that all human beings take part in a shared experience in virtue of being human and that this experience must be recognized, preserved and communally worked upon.

Dignity as an intrinsic possession belonging to all persons is regularly invoked in two philosophical schools of thought: Catholicism and Kantianism.[7] Kantian ethics argue that each human has within them a transcendental kernel—an inherent worth and capacity for moral decision making that is distinctly human.[8] This kernel is the essence of human dignity, with it coming the right to have one's dignity recognized and the responsibility to extend the same recognition to others. Dignity also operates as a politic of recognition instilling not only a right to dignity, but a duty to recognize and respect the dignity of others.[9]

The Kantian conception of dignity has played a large role in the therotization and practice of human rights.[10] For example, dignity is cited in legal frameworks such as the German Basic Law,[11] and The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa[12] and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[13] Kant's main contributions to human rights theory lie in this shift from honour to dignity as a basis for respect.[14] While honour stems from one's social and/or economic standing, dignity stems from inalienable personhood.[15]

Catholic Theology follows a similar trajectory, however, the source of this dignity is not this transcendental kernel, but God who created Humankind in his likeness.[16] Within this tradition, each human life is considered sacred and must be respected as such. Gaudium et Spes states:

> Though made of body and soul, man is one. Through his bodily composition he gathers to himself the elements of the material world; thus they reach their crown through him, and through him raise their voice in free praise of the Creator. For this reason man is not allowed to despise his bodily life, rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day. Nevertheless, wounded by sin, man experiences rebellious stirrings in his body. But the very dignity of man postulates that man glorify God in his body and forbid it to serve the evil inclinations of his heart.[17]

Similar to Kantian ethics, in Catholicism dignity is not only a specialness that entitles an individual with rights, it is also a responsibility to respect and protect

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[7] Ibid., pp. 17, 19–22.

[8] Ibid., pp. 24, 54.

[9] Bayefsky, pp. 810–811.

[10] Ibid.

[11] German Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection, Federal Office of Justice.

[12] Republic of South Africa.

[13] United Nations.

[14] Bayefsky, p. 810.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Rosen, pp. 3, 23.

[17] Pope Paul VI.

the humanity of others. However, unlike Kantian ethics, Catholicism also sees dignity as an obedience. By describing dignity as inalienable, transcendent, and spiritual, both schools of thought see dignity as the basis of some sort of moral project, although it is likely that these projects may be vastly different.

Despite its resonance, there are a host of rhetorical difficulties posed by the dignity as intrinsic conception that remain unremedied. Namely, the idea that dignity is irrevocable does not hold in situations where dignity has in fact been taken away.[18] This argument is often resolved by claims that intrinsic dignity is deployed for normative purposes as opposed to empirical ones. However, there remains confusion about what these normative purposes are and what they aim to do. What dignity is and what it is supposed to achieve is often situationally determined, its character being the product of a particular time, place, and experience.[19] Consequently, critics have accused dignity of being a jack of all trades, but master of none. More importantly, critics ask why we should use dignity, when there are more transparent ways to get one's message across: why say dignity when one can say autonomy, human rights, or whichever term gets to the heart of the demands?[20] Critics are right to question the pedestal dignity is placed on. Left unattached to any tangible goods or entitlements dignity begins to lose its substance, becoming a virtue signal that any project can attach itself to, including ruling class projects. Further, as aforementioned, it is likely that some fragments of the Catholic religion and followers of Kantian ethics although agreeing on dignity's core tenets, could evoke dignity in service of vastly different arguments on issues such as marriage rights, abortion, and bioethics.[21] However, despite its lack of defined character, dignity still retains its rhetorical force, and this power cannot be disregarded.

II. Employing Dignity in Social Justice Movements

Notwithstanding its ubiquitous and often ambiguous deployments, dignity makes frequent appearances in a wide range of lexicons ranging from constitutional frameworks to grassroots social justice discourse. It is often argued by authors such as Pinker[22] and Macklin[23] that dignity's fluid nature provides no pragmatic course of action, merely acting as a stand-in for more concrete ideals like autonomy. However, these arguments often misinterpret the sort of work dignity does. Dignity is not employed because of its linguistic precision but rather its strong emotional appeal, which prompts a sense of urgency and importance that other words are unable to convey. On my view, what has enabled dignity to do this work is its commitment to universalism. The everyday person feels entitled to dignity and there is the expectation that this entitlement be acknowledged by others. What springs a defence for dignity is not its intrinsic nature but the realization that dignity, although universal,

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[18] Mattson and Clark, p. 306.

[19] Ibid., p. 305.

[20] Macklin, p. 1420.

[21] Rosen, p. 6.

[22] Pinker, para 3.

[23] Macklin, pp. 1419–1420.

is never entirely secure. There are high stakes, particularly for the marginalized who may reach a point where the claim of dignity provides their only and best moral leverage against state coercion. In order to understand this, one must conceptualize dignity as being something beyond a virtue. More so than anything, dignity is an agreement between individuals and an agreement between individuals and the state; it outlines the parameters of what constitutes acceptable treatment of other human beings. Dignity is often deeply personal. A loss of dignity is associated with the feeling of having failed or having been failed by others in some respect. Although borne out of unfortunate circumstances, this is where dignity presents a strategic benefit to social movements.

Dignity appeals to a universal desire for full, unbridled inclusion into legal, moral, and social personhood. Although taking different forms depending on the context in which it exists, dignity is capable of being interculturally understood.[24] Harnessing intercultural resonance is what enables diverse groups to mobilize around common goals and initiatives. Dignity is the siren that triggers an internal and communal inquiry into abuses by the state and elite. This trigger is unquestionably valuable to justice movements that face the daunting task of recruiting for a campaign, which is almost an entirely uphill struggle. It provides a baseline for collective consciousness, which can be built upon by effective and sustained organizing.

However, leading from this, one must be cautious of romanticizing dignity. As stated before, though dignity has a long history in social discourse, it has not always been deployed in service of collective actions and social reform. In many instances, dignity as status and dignity as behaviour are used to enforce conformity with social norms and state demands. Further, in an effort to delegitimize movements, the state will often label movements undignified—drawing attention only to supposedly immoral behaviour like arson or looting, ignoring the long-held discontent and frustrations that produced such actions. This raises several concerns when movements wish to re-appropriate dignity for their own purposes. The first issue is that even when movements use dignity as a rallying tool, the ideas, values, and behaviours traditionally associated with the term retain their conservative influence. As explored by Mattson and Clark,[25] dignity is not always framed as a matter of equal recognition, but rather a demand for recognition from the state. Consequently, in an attempt to disprove the narrative that movements lack dignity, they often end up abiding by the same social parameters they aim to dismantle. This pursuit of recognition is ultimately unfruitful, keeping movements in debt to a morality that is neither useful to their purposes nor followed by the coercive power they are appealing to.

Writing on the ideology of decolonization, in *The Wretched of The Earth*, Frantz Fanon argues that decolonization requires a complete substitution of "one 'species' of mankind by another".[26] For Fanon, this substitution must be "unconditional,

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[24] Mattson and Clark, p. 304.
[25] Ibid., p. 306.
[26] Fanon, p. 35.

absolute, total and seamless".[27] From the very first day of their insurgency, colonial subjects must commit themselves to this total inversion. The pursuit of this requires the formation of a new national identity that does away with traditional moral leaders like the state and landowning class. For Fanon, the embeddedness of colonization that informs everything from the wealth of colonial nations to the self-image of colonial subjects, can seldom be destroyed without a radical transformation of every aspect of social, political, and economic life. Consequently, given its bourgeois origins, Fanon would caution against an uptake of dignity without a serious reappropriation of its current form.

Left unchallenged, dignity paralyzes efforts to renegotiate the existing power dynamic between the oppressed and the oppressor. Because of its reputation as an emblem of justice, respect, and moral worthiness, dignity's underlying motives and their benefactors often go unchallenged. Consequently, when not appropriated for oppositional use for the marginalized, what appears like a venture for equal dignity is an aspiration to belong to the privileged class, a conformity to rather than a challenging of hierarchical structures. The oppressed with the greatest proximity to the ruling class are the most vulnerable to this sort of deception, often inflicting a respectability politic upon the rest of the movement.[28] This call for a respectability politic—seeking moral approval or validation from the elite actors—often serves an individual, rather than a collective purpose, allowing the colonized bourgeois to maintain a foot in both worlds. But as Fanon states, for those furthest removed from the seat of power:

> dignity has nothing to do with the dignity of the human individual: for that human individual has never heard tell of it. All that the native has seen in his country is that they can freely arrest him, beat him, starve him: and no professor of ethics, no priest has ever come to be beaten in his place, nor to share their bread with him. As far as the native is concerned, morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence—in a word, to put him out of the picture.[29]

For dignity to be an asset to social movements, there must be a renegotiation of its character and aspirations which rely on taking cues from the most marginalized. This renegotiation includes a willingness to abandon dignity in favor of a new moral project when necessary. However, abandoning dignity, or any other sorts of language, is easier said than done.

Despite these rhetorical difficulties caused by its coercive deployment, moving away from dignity requires sacrifice. It requires movements to let go of their perceived obligations to the state's conceptualization of dignity and step into an unknown where they must reimagine what constitutes moral value. This process requires an epistemological reconstruction that examines the racialized, classed, and gendered origins of moral worth. Dignity is not exclusively a tool of coercion.

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[27] Fanon.
[28] Ibid., p. 43.
[29] Ibid.

Cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall have resisted the oversimplification of the relationship between ideology and class.[30] For Hall, it is reductionist to assume the bourgeois class is the only group that engages in ideological production.[31] Ideas such as dignity, human rights, and autonomy are not produced solely by the bourgeoisie and then passed down to the working class. There is a cultural struggle, or at least a cultural negotiation underlining the cultural capital of these prominent ideas.[32] Reducing dignity to merely a bourgeois export erases the working class' contributions to the ideological landscape and potentially robs them of the language that they have equal ownership of. Besides, it is possible to imagine that once repurposed, the bourgeois origins of dignity do not erase its potential usefulness to social movements and other working-class projects.

The conception that ideas gain their value and utility through a cultural struggle or cultural negotiation is an important one. Without such a process, we see the aforementioned dilemma in which without repurposing dignity to serve clear and precise shared goals movements can end up seeking recognition from elites rather than advancements to their cause. When deployed within an oppressive context, dignity demands more from the oppressed than the oppressor by inflicting on them an obligation to achieve their ends in a way that adheres to, rather than disrupts, the existing social order. This is significant as it reveals dignity not as a social equalizer, but as a measure of security and sociopolitical and economic power. Yet to the same extent, dignity is never entirely fixed into place, it can uptaken and reappropriated at any time. Hall makes an important observation:

> Although emergent cultural forms do not contain their own guarantees, they do contain real possibilities. Although they cannot be thought of as self-sufficient and outside of the structuring effects of the conditions that deeply penetrate and organise the social formation, they cannot be reduced to them either.[33]

We can apply Hall's understanding of cultural forms to dignity's use in social movements. It is in large part a history of social activism by the oppressed that has elevated the term to its prestige and inverted its meaning, yet in many ways dignity also remains shaped by its bourgeois origins. Either way, neither of these conceptions are ever entirely secure, the past informs but does not entirely dictate the future. For this reason, dignity can be salvaged. However, in order to be of value to movements it must be re-appropriated and put in service of the "real possibilities" it contains. In the case of social movements, this means embracing this third conception of dignity: dignity as intrinsic. This conception attaches moral worthiness to personhood in effect providing a common ground in which groups can mobilize from. The Kantian or Catholic origins of dignity are not particularly important, as the main objective is to motivate individuals to recognize their shared conditions, and put this recognition in service of concrete demands.

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[30] Hall, pp. 181–182.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 206.

To do so groups must (1) *pragmatize dignity* by attaching it to concrete goals like the securement of rights and resources, and (2) *use dignity to critique* rather than appeal to the state and other elite institutions.

To *pragmatize dignity* is to move from an abstract to a concrete conception.[34] The objective of this move is to prompt mobilization to secure material, political and economic means as opposed to symbolic recognition. To do this, the movement's definition of human dignity should derive from the social justice model. Coined by Beitz and cited by Donnelly,[35] the social justice model asserts that human rights (or for our purposes, human dignity) are entitlements to resources that allow individuals to satisfy important human interests. Determining an exhaustive list of these interests is not necessary nor effective, as each movement has their own set of concerns and conditions. However, in a broad sense, citizens are judging the moral legitimacy of the state based on a principle of justice that considers the distribution of social benefits and burdens to determine the importance and value of certain social interests, values, and resources.[36] When a threshold of inequality and deprivation is reached, it triggers a disillusionment. Dignity provides a rallying base for which this consciousness can transform into mobilization. A prime example of this is the transit fare protest in Chile.

When subway fare in Santiago was increased by 30 pesos, Chilean students staged a mass fare evasion in protest. The protest quickly spread to the streets, the campaign expanding to include discontent about low wages, the dissolution of social safety nets, political corruption and more.[37] The protest was further fueled by allegations of police brutality against students by the Carabinéros (Chilean police) and President Pinéra's declaration of a public emergency where he suggested that Chile was in a "state of war" presumably referring to protestors as public enemies.[38] Pinéra's address exemplifies how when faced with public discontent, the state and its elite partners will attempt to delegitimize movements by labelling participants and their cause undignified. However, in a reconstructed use of dignity, it is not conformity with the state's idea of respectability that allows groups to regain their lost sense of respect, but mobilization behind a concept that aims at securing concrete social, political, and economic demands. A pamphlet handed out to protestors reads:

> It's not just the Metro! It's health, it's education, it's pensions; it's housing; it's the salaries of MPs; it's the price hike for electricity; it's the cost of petrol; it's the thieving by the Armed Forces; it's the amnesty for businessmen; it's the dignity of a whole society![39]

The pamphlet demonstrates dignity's emotional resonance and rhetorical utility to social movements. Dignity is uncompromising. So too, therefore, are the demands

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[34] Weston, p. 332.
[35] Donnelly, p. 401.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Gregg.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., para 7.

associated with it. When dignity is attached to tangible goals such as a demand for better wages, healthcare, or housing, it develops a definition and character that provides a basis for social progress. This not only allows movements to remain organized, it fuels grander aspirations and sustains action.

A second sort of appropriation, using *dignity to critique* the state rather than seek its approval, may also prove useful. Discourse can often represent dignity as obedience rather than as an entitlement to be treated with respect by the state and others. We saw this in the case of President Piñera's discussion of protests or in the ongoing pressure modern protestors face to emphasize the peaceful nature of their demonstration. However, the luxury of peaceful protest often resides with those who have alternative avenues for expressing grievances.[40] Using dignity to critique makes dignity the responsibility of the state, not the individual, and seeks to make structural violence the target of indignity. Structural violence refers to the neglect of society's most vulnerable. Mimicking the sentiments of Chilean protesters, this includes the state and its elite partners' role in perpetuating housing and food insecurity, mass incarceration, police violence, low wages and other forms of organized violence that prevent individuals from accessing full legal, social, and economic personhood. An inversion of this dynamic may help to reveal the state's neglect while also allowing a movement to reclaim the moral narrative. This inversion is not done with the primary aim of casting guilt, it has far more transformative goals including the deconstruction of the inferiority complex internalized by the oppressed, the promotion of critical dialogue, and goal setting.

III. Conclusion

Dignity has an extensive and complex history in the arena of social justice. From its conception as a status term used to legitimize and reinforce social hierarchy to its use as a mobilization tool for social justice movements, dignity's meaning is polymorphous and leveraged to many ends. However, despite its fluid nature, dignity serves an important social function, which should not be diminished or undervalued. Dignity is fundamentally aspirational. Further, both Kantian ethics and Catholic Theology agree that dignity, both as an intrinsic possession and a duty owed to others, is of transcendent value.

The *dignity as intrinsic* conception proves vital in the context of social movements where participants must redefine dignity's meaning to put it in service of a new project, which aims to improve the conditions of its membership. However, this work can only be done once a movement reconciles dignity's various rhetorical uses, repurposing the term to serve goals that are concrete and tangible. It is through this ownership that dignity is given back to the people and put on the path to do the important work that it is capable of.

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[40]Cunha, para 11.

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AGAINST MIND UPLOADING OPTIMISM: THE ARGUMENT FROM LOCATIONAL INDETERMINACY

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In this paper I investigate philosophical aspects of "mind uploading," or the process of uploading a human mind onto a computer system. More specifically, I focus on an ongoing debate about whether a person can survive a mind upload and end up housed in the computer system after the process. The mind uploading optimist affirms that a person can survive the transition onto a computer system, while the pessimist denies this possibility. I make a case for pessimism by presenting an argument against optimism. The optimist asserts that through a gradual uploading process the person's consciousness remains continuous, and that this continuity provides enough verification that the person survives as well. My argument, which I call the "argument from locational indeterminacy," shows that optimism cannot account for the person's location during the intermediate steps of a gradual upload, when the person is only partially uploaded. These locational indeterminacies cast doubt on whether a person can successfully make the transition onto a computer system.

Keywords: mind uploading · personal identity · persistence · David Chalmers · continuity of consciousness

I. Mind uploading and the argument from locational indeterminacy

Theories of personal identity and personal persistence assign properties to the concept "personhood" in order to explain what makes a person x at one time be identical to a person y at some other time. Notably, John Locke holds a psychological continuity view, claiming that person x persists through time by having a continuous chain of connected memories, which he calls "consciousness".[1] Generally, philosophers use thought experiments to argue for and against these theories

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[1] Locke's "memory theory" comes from Book 2, Ch. 27 of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Locke).

of personal identity and personal persistence. [2] In this paper, I will focus on "mind uploading," a newer development in these thought experiments that contends with our everyday intuitions about consciousness and personhood.

Mind uploading is a process in which—either gradually or instantly—an individual's entire mind is uploaded onto a computer system.[3] Similar to cases of teletransportation and human vegetative states, mind uploading has recently been brought up as a theoretical posit for which views of personal identity and persistence must account. Additionally, mind uploading has also been discussed practically in the context of a "Singularity," a hypothetical state of civilization where rapid advancements in artificial intelligence become uncontrollable.[4] In his paper titled "The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis," David Chalmers hypothesizes that humans may have the potential to integrate into this world through various forms of mind enhancement, including mind uploading.[5]

Once we propose mind uploading as a possible mode of integration, however, a question regarding personal identity emerges: if I am uploaded, do I survive the transition onto a computer? Or, if we equate survivability to personal identity preservation, would mind uploading preserve personal identity? To this question, we may respond in one of two ways: (1) *optimism*, claiming "yes"; and (2) *pessimism*, claiming "no."

In this paper I will be posing a dilemma for optimism, beginning with Chalmer's illustration of a "gradual uploading" process.[6] In this procedure, a machine replaces a person's brain neuron-by-neuron with isomorphic (functionally identical) counterparts and offloads the neural processing to a computer. The thought is that as the machine replaces each neuron there is no determinate moment when the person's stream of consciousness is disrupted. And this continuity of consciousness provides sufficient evidence that the person persists the transfer as well. However, Chalmers and other optimists say little about the intermediate stages of a gradual upload, when the person is only partially uploaded. Specifically, as we analyze the intermediate stages further, we see that the optimist cannot account for indeterminacies concerning the person's location. According to my argument, these locational indeterminacies problematize the optimist's claim that the person truly persists through the mind uploading process.

My argument from locational indeterminacy is as follows:

1. For optimism to be feasible, it must be able to sufficiently account for the subject's location throughout the process.

2. Optimism cannot sufficiently account for the subject's location throughout the process.

3. Therefore (by 1, 2), optimism is not feasible.

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[2] For instance, see *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit) and *The Human Animal* (Olson).
[3] Chalmers.
[4] Bostrom; Kurzweil.
[5] Chalmers.
[6] Ibid., p. 34.

The optimist might immediately respond by denying the first premise and question why they need to account for the subject's location in the first place. However, in the mind uploading procedure, we are determining whether or not a person successfully *transitions* into the computer housing. If this transition is successful, then—and only then—can we say that the mind upload has also been successful in preserving personal identity. But, if we cannot account for the location of the person throughout an upload, it becomes problematic and impractical when arguing that they have successfully made the transition. Consequently, optimism *should* be able to account for the subject's location to conclude that they survive the transition onto computer hardware.

I now aim to motivate premise 2. To do so, I will provide a brief overview of two theories of persistence, three-dimensionalism and four-dimensionalism. Then, I will analyze the optimist's argument from gradual uploading and argue that optimism's reliance on the "continuity of consciousness" binds the view to a phenomenal account of personal identity. In §III, I will motivate the second premise.

II. Three preliminaries

Before motivating the second premise of my argument from locational indeterminacy, I will first clarify and assess the optimist's overall position, while pointing out some of its philosophically crucial background commitments.

II.a. Persistence of objects

The "persistence of objects" is a philosophical inquiry into what it takes for an object to remain the same through time. Two leading views of the are "endurantism" (three-dimensionalism) and "perdurantism" (four-dimensionalism). Consider the following definitions:

> **Endurantism:** The view that argues that an object o persists through time by being wholly present at every instance of time during its existence.[7] Therefore, if o exists from time t_1 to t_n, o persists through time by being wholly present at $t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_n$.

> **Perdurantism:** The view that argues that an object o persists through time by being spread out through time similar to how the object is physically spread out through space.[8] This means that each object has temporal parts, or parts that exist at particular times. An example of a temporal part would be "me at 10:00 am on my twentieth birthday."

To clarify things, consider the following example: Think about a simple object, such as a chair, persisting from 8:00 am to 9:00 am on January 20, 2020. The endurantist would argue that the chair wholly exists at 8:00 am, wholly exists at

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[7] For defenses of endurantism, see "In Defence of Three-Dimensionalism" (Fine) and *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Baker).

[8] For a defense of perdurantism, see *Four-Dimensionalism* (Sider).

9:00am, and at every other interval between the two. Contrarily, the perdurantist claims that the chair persists due to infinitely many instantaneous objects that exist at every moment of the chair's existence (such as "the chair at 8:01 am," "the chair at 8:02 am," etc.), all of which together compose "the chair." This is similar to how all parts of my body, even though they are positioned in different regions of space, compose "my body." Because objects under perdurantism are actually the sums of infinitely many temporal parts, Ted Sider has said objects are really "space-time worms," spread out through time.[9]

Of course, these two views do not exhaust the list of possible views of persistence. However, three-dimensionalism and four-dimensionalism are still the most widely accepted and discussed in the literature. Many other views of persistence are either versions of three-dimensionalism and four-dimensionalism or hybrid theories that merge qualities of both.[10] And since we are ascertaining whether a person can persist a mind upload, these views set an important standard. Consequently, I will distinguish between two different optimist views of mind uploading: the view that takes on three-dimensionalism (3-D optimism) and the view that takes on four-dimensionalism (4-D optimism).

II.b. The optimist's argument from gradual upload-ing

As previously mentioned, Chalmers appeals to a gradual uploading procedure to argue for optimism.[11] He summarizes gradual uploading as a process in which

> one or more nanotechnology devices (perhaps tiny robots) are inserted into the brain and attach themselves to a single neuron. Each device learns to simulate the behavior of the associated neuron and also learns about its connectivity. Once it simulates the neuron's behavior well enough, it takes the place of the original neuron, perhaps leaving receptors and effectors in place and offloading the relevant processing to a computer via radio transmitters. It then moves to other neurons and repeats the procedure, until eventually every neuron has been replaced by an emulation, and perhaps all processing has been offloaded to a computer.[12]

The optimist asks us to imagine a subject S who undergoes a gradual mind upload over the course of 100 (or so) months. Every month, a machine replaces 1% of S's brain with isomorphic parts that send relevant processing information to a computer system. So by the end of the 100 month procedure all of S's brain is replaced, fully uploading their consciousness.

Now we examine S after one month of the process, which we will call S_1 (Sn will be the system at n months of the procedure). Consider S's persistence from

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[9] Sider, p. 53.
[10] An example of a hybrid view would be one where objects and persons persist differently and require different metaphysical analyses.
[11] Chalmers, pp. 35–40.
[12] Ibid., p. 34.

S_0 to S_1: Would S_1 be identical to S? To the optimist, it is natural to suppose that replacing a mere 1% of S's brain should not change their identity. Therefore, S_1 and S_0 are identical, and the person persisted through the first month. Now consider S's persistence from S_1 to S_2. Was there a moment between S_1 and S_2 where S stops existing? Again, it is not plausible to say that S's identity changes when only 2% of their brain has been replaced. As we continue this form of examination for the entire 100-month procedure, the optimist thinks that no matter which step of the process we pick from S_n to S_{n+1} (in which $n < 100$), we will never find a moment wherein S ceases to exist. The optimist thus concludes that S persists through the gradual upload. In other words, the person has survived, personal identity has been preserved, and their consciousness has remained continuous. If this is correct, uploading eliminates the need for a biological body since the person's body no longer grounds their existence.

This argument from gradual uploading requires the optimist to assume "Functionalism." This is the view that what ultimately matters for mental states is their *function* of the given system to which they are a part.[13] By essentially keeping the functional role of neurons through isomorphic receptors, the optimist associates human survivability with retaining the function of the person's brain and mental states. Hence, they assume that some form of functionalism is correct. For the purposes of my paper, I will be assuming functionalism holds, since my argument works even if we grant it.

Returning to 3-D and 4-D optimism, the 3-D optimist would argue that S persists through time and the upload by being wholly present at every step of the process from S_0 to S_{100}. S then continues to persist in the same way but is instead housed in a computer system. The 4-D optimist, on the other hand, would insist that S is purely a fusion of temporal parts, each of which marks S at a specific moment in the process. For example, S_{23}—S at 23 months of uploading—would be a temporal part of S. I must also note that, for a 4-D optimist, there are two phases of S's space-time worm: one phase composed of the temporal parts when S was housed in a biological body, and another phase composed of the temporal parts when S is housed in the computer system. (These purely theoretical phases will become important later.)

II.c. The continuity of consciousness and a phenomenal identity

In his original discussion, Chalmers takes "continuity of consciousness" and "personal identity" as primitive. Considering that my argument focuses on these two notions, I want to quickly expand on these ideas. For our current purposes, however, a broad overview of the two will suffice.

To begin, let us assume that "continuity of consciousness" is a *stream* of consciousness with no disruption in its flow. The continuous flow of consciousness occurs when there is a connection between experiences e_1, e_2, e_3, and so on. If you were to listen to the B-major scale, for example, your experiences of hearing

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[13] Fodor.

first a B, then a C#, then a D#, etc., would clearly be *unified* in the same stream of consciousness. According to the Lockean view I am advocating for, our consciousness continuously flows as sensory experiences, thoughts, memories, beliefs, etc., in succession. Although philosophers disagree about the nature of these experiences and how they "connect" to form a stream of consciousness, the optimist only needs this continuity to verify survivability after a mind upload. Therefore, we have the following definition of a continuous stream of consciousness for the optimist's position:

> **Continuity of Consciousness:** Our consciousness is continuous iff it "flows" (in the above way) without disruption.[14]

According to Chalmers, the conditions of gradual upload should not disrupt this continuity in consciousness. Let us imagine that S maintains a stream of consciousness (such as, perhaps, looking out the window of a moving train at the passing scenery) while they undergo one move from S_n to S_{n+1}. Would the replacement of this chunk of neurons be enough to completely halt the stream of consciousness? Essentially, the optimist argues that there is no logical *sharp cut-off* where the individual's stream of consciousness vanishes from any single move during the process. And if at every step of the process the person's stream of consciousness remains undisrupted, they think that this is sufficient reason to conclude that the process preserves the person as well.

However, even if the person's consciousness does not disappear immediately at one sharp cutoff, we might wonder if the person's consciousness slowly dissipates while being offloaded to the computer. In response, I would argue that it would be improbable for a "flowing consciousness" to fade in this way. If I have 50% of my mind uploaded to a computer, and I have a visual experience of a red ball, would my visual experience of red-ness be different? Or would I have a visual experience of a deformed shape? Optimism should oppose this, as it is unlikely that my experience would have different phenomenal qualities on the basis that my consciousness has faded.

Moreover, arguing that consciousness fades in this situation introduces another problem. In a mind upload, since a machine replaces neurons with isomorphic parts, the brain will function in the same way regardless of a fading consciousness, meaning that the person will still have the exact same beliefs about the phenomenology of her experiences. In the red ball example, a partially uploaded person would still *believe* and act as if her visual experience remains undisrupted, but the *actual* conscious experience would be faded. Chalmers argues that this possibility leads to an individual who is radically out of touch with her own conscious states, which is absurd.[15] Therefore, since we cannot find a sharp cutoff of consciousness

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[14] Of course, there are many moments where our streams of consciousness are, somewhat, disrupted: for example, we can look at a dreamless sleep. This is called the bridge problem. It brings into question why we should be able to have these gaps in our streams of consciousness and "come out," or survive, as the same person. For an interesting discussion about a possible solution to the bridge problem, see "Phenomenal Continuity and the Bridge Problem" (Gustafsson). He argues that we can look at a dreamless sleep in a way as to not be a disruption to our streams of consciousness.

[15] Chalmers, p. 39.

and the phenomenology of experiences cannot gradually fade, the continuity of consciousness must hold in a gradual upload.

Optimism's use of the continuity of consciousness binds the view to two assumptions: (i) the self and consciousness are inseparable, and (ii) conscious flow is what makes us the same persons to begin with. According to optimism, a person's consciousness remaining continuous throughout a gradual upload provides sufficient evidence that the person persists through the transition to a computer. Therefore, their argument requires a theory of personal identity rooted in consciousness to describe a person's persistence conditions. These are called "phenomenal" accounts of personal identity since they attribute the self to phenomenal, or experiential, characteristics.[16]

As explained earlier, theories of personal persistence characterize what it takes for a person x at some time to be identical to a person y at some other time. Phenomenal identity views ascribe a person's persistence conditions to a form of phenomenal continuity—what we previously called "the continuity of consciousness." For a person to persist through time on the phenomenal account, there must exist a connection between their experiences and streams of consciousness, i.e., there must exist phenomenal continuity between the person at one time and the same person at another time.

Because of this link between the self and phenomenal continuity, the optimist also implicitly accepts an inseparability of the two. Formally:

> **Inseparability:** The view that argues that the self and phenomenal continuity cannot come apart. All experiences in a single (non-branching) stream of consciousness belong to the same self.[17]

This inseparability thesis strongly binds the optimist to a phenomenal account of personal identity, and vice-versa. It might be asked, however, "why can't the optimist just appeal to a more conventional psychological continuity approach to personal identity?" For instance, Shoemaker has a famous functionalist version of the psychological continuity approach.[18] He argues that a person x at t_1 is identical to a person y at t_2 iff there exists a sufficient link of causal dependence between the mental states of x and the mental states of y.[19] For example, suppose that S falls into a dreamless sleep, is uploaded, and then the uploaded being wakes up. Here, there is no phenomenal continuity, yet there would still be psychological continuity of Shoemaker's kind since the uploaded being's mental states have a sufficient causal link to the non-uploaded person's mental states. Then the optimist is not forced to appeal to the strong sense of phenomenal identity.

As a response to this type of move, I want to clarify that I am concerned with the view of personal identity that makes optimism *most convincing*. And I think optimism is ultimately harmed by moving away from phenomenal identity. One core upshot of the argument from gradual uploading is that it keeps our intuition

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[16] For a more fleshed out account of phenomenal identity, see *The Phenomenal Self* (Dainton).
[17] Ibid., p. 557.
[18] Shoemaker and Swinburne.
[19] Ibid.

that if a person's stream of consciousness remains fluid throughout the process, we have good reason to say the person does so as well. Thus, in escaping the question of phenomenal identity, optimists would need to revamp their overall position and leading arguments, which would also get rid of the common intuition that drives someone to take on optimism in the first place.

However, the ultimate issue for optimism does not lie in the preservation of phenomenal continuity. Rather, I derive my argument from indeterminacies that arise when we try to track the person's location.

III. Motivating premise 2

In summary, I have introduced the optimist's overall position and two background views in their argument. The optimist, with their utilization of the continuity of consciousness, presupposes a phenomenal account of personal identity and an inseparability of the self and phenomenal continuity. In this section I will motivate Premise 2 of my argument, which states:

> 2. *Optimism cannot sufficiently account for the subject's location throughout the process.*

The locational indeterminacies in premise 2 stem from the intermediate stages of the upload, when the person is grounded partially in a body and partially in a computer system. In fact, indeterminacies during these steps of the upload lead the optimist to their own conclusion. Since we cannot *determinately* find a point when the person goes out of existence, or when her stream of consciousness halts, they take this as reason for us to think she successfully survives the transfer onto a computer. But I think this is a mistake: these indeterminacies ultimately *problematize* optimism.

By accepting the inseparability thesis, the optimist accepts that where our consciousness goes, we go as well. Through a mind upload, we will be disrupting the continuity of our grounded conscious experience and, therefore, change the housing of ourselves. For the survivability of personhood to be possible, one must begin fully housed in a biological body (at S_0), progress through a time of being housed partially in a body and partially in a computer system (at S_n, where $0 < n < 100$), and finally end up housed entirely in the computer system (at S_{100}). S_{100} marks the time when all of the person's consciousness becomes housed in the computer, allowing for the safe destruction of the biological body. For this process to be survivable, the self must eventually make a housing transition from the biological body to the computer system. If the self has not made this necessary transition for survival, then the destruction of the body would be the death of the subject.

According to the Lockean view, we consider ourselves to be spatially and temporally located where our stream of consciousness is housed. For example, it would be incoherent of me to claim that I am located somewhere other than in this chair at my desk. As discussed previously, phenomenal theories of personal identity state that streams of consciousness are the essential property of personhood. So, if the person's stream of consciousness is housed in a body, surely that is also where she is

located. Consider someone undergoing a mind upload: if x % of her brain is up-loaded while y % of her brain is still biological matter, where exactly is she located? There seem to be three options:

(a) She is wholly located in both the body and computer simultaneously.

(b) She is not located in the body nor in the computer.

(c) At every stage of the process, she is wholly located in *either* the body *or* the computer.

The 3-D and 4-D optimist accounts come in handy here. If our two foundational theories of persistence cannot help the optimist explain these locational indeter-minacies, then they will be in the unenviable position of having to give their own idiosyncratic account of "persistence through time."

According to the 3-D optimist, a person persists through time by being wholly present and wholly located at every instantaneous time slice from birth until death. On the other hand, the 4-D optimist argues that for an individual to persist through time, she must exist as a space-time worm, or fusion of temporal parts, from the time she came into existence to the time she goes out of existence. In other words, she exists as an entity that is both spatially and temporally extended.

Now we can focus on the optimist's options. Surely an optimist who accepts option (a)—that the person is multi-located (both in the biological body and in the computer—would only bring about more metaphysical problems for their view. Theories of multi-location state that an entity is "multi-located" just in case it is wholly located in two or more space-time regions.[20] First, for both 3-D and 4-D optimism, the multi-location definition has not actually been met: It could be argued that she is not *wholly located* anywhere, since her existence is grounded partially in a body and partially in a computer system. And even if we were to maintain that she is wholly located, it would be difficult to maintain that he is wholly located in both places simultaneously. Since the optimist attributes personal identity and selfhood to phenomenal continuity, they could not argue for a multi-location of the subject because her conscious experience remains unified in one single location. Hence, option (a) is unhelpful for either versions of optimism.

Likewise, option (b)—where the person is not located in the body nor in the computer—is unproductive for optimism's goals. Under this option, the 3-D opti-mist's primary requirement for maintaining persistence—that a person is wholly present and located at each instance in time—is thwarted. As well, the 4-D require-ment fails to be met. In either position, there is a gap during the intermediate stages, and both three-dimensionalism and four-dimensionalism claim that this gap would mean non-existence. For 3-D optimism, the person would not be wholly present, and for 4-D optimism, the space-time worm would vanish. This would mean that the person is in existence at S_0, goes out of existence during the intermediate stages from $0 < n < 100$, and a new, identical subject comes back into existence at S_{100}. This gap in existence leaves far too many questions unanswered for option (b) to

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[20]Barker and Dowe.

sufficiently account for the person's location throughout a gradual upload. For example, how are we to understand the subject's ability to come back into existence from a state of non-existence? Also, the person's uploaded brain still functions as identical to the original brain. So if the person remains conscious and has no disruption in his stream of consciousness, how can we see her as a non-located, non-existing being?

Option (c) states that for any step of the process n, the person must only be located in either the physical body or the computer system. I advocated for the plausible idea that a person's stream of consciousness is what ultimately matters for understanding her location. The optimist's implicit acceptance of the inseparability thesis forces them to accept this idea as well. If option (c) proves to be correct and the gradual upload allows for survivability, then there must be a change where her stream of consciousness transitions into a new computer housing. In this situation, we must search the person's locational transfer. At what moment of the upload would we be able to say the self is housed in a computer?

Depending on the optimist's view of persistence, this housing transition can be understood differently. For the 3-D view, the person would be wholly located in her biological body and then, at some pivotal moment, wholly located in the computer system. For the 4-D view, the person persists as the spacetime worm with temporal parts. As mentioned in §II.B, two temporal parts will mark two *phases* of the person: one composed of the time he is housed in a biological body and another composed of the time he is housed in a computer. The 4-D optimist must look for when the first phase ends and the second phase begins to successfully account for the locational transition. Therefore, In both the 3-D and 4-D pictures, the optimist must appeal to the aforementioned sharp cutoff scenario. At some instantaneous time slice during the gradual upload, the locational transition from the biological body to the computer system occurs. The self would, at this single instant, transfer into the new computer housing. I find this conclusion worrisome to accept based on my preceding arguments. Specifically, the optimist agrees that it is challenging to find a pivotal moment when a major change occurs. The question lies in determining the pivotal moment when the person's stream of consciousness halts and they go out of existence. In the same way, I find it equally difficult and indeterminate to search for a moment when the person changes housing and location. Hence, it is entirely possible that—after completing the gradual upload and destroying the biological body—the person has not survived the transfer. Accepting option (c) would not give us a clear indication that the person has been preserved in the upload. Therefore, since the cutoff scenario cannot sufficiently explain the locational and housing transition, optimism cannot utilize option (c).

Overall, according to my analysis, options (a), (b), and (c) have all failed for both versions of optimism. The optimist might raise an option (d) as a potential counter. Perhaps the self *is* located in one single region during the intermediate steps of the uploading process. But this region includes both the person's body and the computer system. The difference here from option (a) is that, rather than being *wholly* located in both places, the person is wholly located in a region that is the conjunction of both places. It is true that this is not a "continuous" region in

this case. Rather, it is a "scattered region." As explained by Cartwright, an object is scattered when the region of space it occupies is disconnected."[21]

But it may be asked, "why can't there be scattered objects?" This question goes quite beyond the scope of this paper. So, instead of arguing that scattered objects cannot exist, I will give a reason to think that a person undergoing a gradual upload cannot be located in a disconnected region. A very classic example of a scattered object is Cartwright's copy of *The Nature of Existence*, in which there is one material object—yet Volume I of the object exists in Cambridge and Volume II exists in Boston.[22] But when in conjunction, these two volumes make up the object "Cartwrights copy of *The Nature of Existence*." Perhaps this case is analogous to the person undergoing an upload in the sense that she exists in a region that is the conjunction of her body (volume I) and the computer system (volume II).

I don't think this analogy holds for uploading a person, though. In the metaphysics of objects, an appeal to scattered objects never branches out far enough to encompass the self. In the *The Nature of Existence* example, without one of the volumes, you wouldn't have sufficient information to have knowledge about the conjunction that makes up *The Nature of Existence*. That is why it is classified as a scattered object; to know the conjunction, you must have information about the parts. If I only had one of the volumes, I wouldn't be able to say I had *The Nature of Existence*. This, I would argue, is the fundamental difference between an individual undergoing a mind upload and this two-volume object; i.e., the same does not hold true for the individual. According to the Lockean viewpoint I am advocating for, consciousness is inextricably bound with phenomenality and personhood. Hence, I do not think there are separate parts of our consciousness that conjoin to make up the self. Rather, we are housed in and where we experience our consciousness.

In sum, I have exhausted all the foreseeable possibilities. Neither 3-D optimism nor 4-D optimism has the firepower to account for these locational and transitional indeterminacies. I have completed my motivation of premise 2 and justified my conclusion that optimism cannot be a workable account for survivability in mind uploading. In this case, uploading a person's mind would create a mere clone of the person due to the preservation of conscious continuity. However, the actual *self* that is required for personal identity preservation would not move into the computer housing. Upon the destruction of the biological body, the person would—at that moment—cease to exist. These locational considerations might be further developed as we learn more about mind uploading, but they should be taken into account before one advocates for a view of optimism. Until this is addressed, I think we should take on a view of pessimism, or the view that we cannot survive a mind upload.

IV. Conclusion

In my preceding analysis, I have presented a challenge for optimism about mind uploading. In essence, my argument was that, even though a person's consciousness

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[21] Cartwright, p. 157.
[22] Ibid.

remains continuous, there exist locational indeterminacies when we attempt to analyze the transition of the self from the biological body into the new computer housing. With my argument from locational indeterminacy, I have demonstrated that we need to consider more than the continuity of consciousness before buying into the notion of mind uploading.

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EXTENDING DAVID HUME'S ANALOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR NONHUMAN ANIMAL MINDS TO PLANTS

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David Hume argues that much of human reasoning is unconscious and instinctual causal reasoning based on observed custom in one's surrounding environment, and thus proceeds from the same foundation as nonhuman animal reasoning. As such, the process of information acquisition that leads to adaptive and flexible (i.e., intelligent) behaviour in humans is the same process performed by nonhuman animals, though to a lesser degree. Therefore, argues Hume, animals possess intelligence and minds of the same kind, though to a lesser degree, than humans.

In this paper, I utilize research on plant behaviour to extend David Hume's analogical argument for nonhuman animal intelligence and minds to plants. I argue that the behaviour exhibited by plants is both adaptive and flexible (thus intelligent) and is based on observed custom in a plant's surrounding environment. As such, for a contemporary Humean theory of mind, plants, along with animals, possess intelligence and minds on the same spectrum and of the same kind as do humans, though to a lesser degree.

Keywords: David Hume · plant minds · plant intelligence · nonhuman animal minds · human minds · reasoning

I. Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the concepts of plant intelligence and plant minds. That humans are intelligent and possess minds is (to most everyone) a given. That nonhuman animals possess some degree of intelligence and some limited form of mind is also generally accepted. That plants, however, possess some form of intelligence and mind is more controversial and generally denied. While it could be possible that non-acting entities (i.e., entities that express no behaviour) possess intelligence, there is no way for an external observer to conclusively confirm this—I can never know for certain whether a rock possesses intelligence, as it never acts. As such, in the forthcoming analysis I will limit my conception of intelligence to dealing

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only with that which is verifiable to an external observer: intelligent *behaviour*. In this paper, I will understand "intelligence" to be adaptive and flexible behaviour. Any entity that is able to, in pursuit of favourable outcomes, alter its behaviour in a non-rigid way based on changing environmental circumstances will thus be understood as an entity that displays intelligence. In regard to plant minds, while it is certainly the case that plants do not have physical brains in the way that humans and nonhuman animals do, I do not limit my conception of mind to existing in or arising solely from a physical brain. Rather, in this paper (acknowledging the lack of philosophical consensus as to what, precisely, a mind is), I will understand a mind to be that entity (a physical brain or otherwise) which is the seat or driving force of intelligence in an organism.

I utilize David Hume's analogical argument for nonhuman animal minds as the foundation of my argument for plant intelligence and plant minds. Hume's argument centres on the similarities between the processes of human and animal information acquisition leading to adaptive and flexible behaviour. I argue that these similarities exist in plant information acquisition, and that they lead to similar adaptive and flexible behaviour. Thus, just as Hume's argument shows that animals possess intelligence and minds of the same kind—though to lesser degrees—as humans, so too can it show that plants possess intelligence and minds of the same kind—though to lesser degrees—as animals. I seek not to prove Hume's argument, but to present it as a strong and intuitive argument for animal minds. I extend Hume's theory to demonstrate that if one agrees with Hume, or at least finds his argument to be potentially compelling, then one must accept that plants possess intelligence and minds, or at the very least consider the strong possibility of the case. I begin the paper by outlining Hume's analogical argument for nonhuman animal intelligence. I then generally outline, with regard to the relevance of this paper, the present state of research on plant behaviour. Finally, I present an argument for plant intelligence and minds based on Hume's argument for animal intelligence and minds, supported by the present state of research into plant intelligence and behaviour.

II. David Hume's Analogical Argument for Nonhuman Animal Intelligence and Minds

David Hume presents his conception of animal cognition in Section XVI of Part III of the first volume of his work *A Treatise on Human Nature* and Section IX of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (the aforementioned sections are both titled "Of the Reason of Animals"). Hume centres his account of cognition, for both human and nonhuman minds, on calling into question the centrality of reason. He considers the faculty of reason to possess two functions: deductive demonstrative reasoning, involving the relation of ideas in the mind (such as math-ematical reasoning), and inductive causal reasoning, involving the use of reason to

acquire beliefs regarding facts about the world.[1] Animals, Hume argues, partake in this second kind of reasoning.

Hume argues that acquiring matters of fact about the material world is the result of analogy—we "expect from any cause the same events, which we have observed to result from similar causes".[2] From the moment one starts living, one begins to observe that certain "causes" result in certain "effects" in the world. The relation between these causes and effects is not a necessary causal connection, but rather an expectation built from the habituation of repeated observation. As time passes, one acquires a bank of such knowledge, observing that, for example, fire can be followed by burning and water can be followed by drowning. There is no way to come by such knowledge except by repeated observation of the constant conjunction of events in the world. With this acquired knowledge, argues Hume, humans intentionally adapt their actions toward favourable ends (self-preservation, avoiding pain, and seeking pleasure). It is observed fact that nonhuman animals take much the same actions toward favourable ends. Because the external, observable actions of animals resemble those of humans, it is reasonable to think that the internal actions of the mind—which drive external actions—also resemble each other. Taken to its logical conclusion, argues Hume, if the internal actions are resembling, the causes of internal actions for humans and animals "must also be resembling".[3] Thus, a dog responding to its name being called, a bird knowing how to build a nest, and a human knowing that they cannot breathe under water, "proceed from a reasoning, that is not in itself different, nor founded on different principles";[4] all these instances proceed from a form of analogy whereby the mind has come to expect that a certain cause will produce certain effects in the world, which were previously observed to be produced by similar causes.

Complex argumentation and reasoning may be able to conclude that "like events must follow like objects".[5] However, argues Hume, the process of belief acquisition via analogy cannot arise from such complex reasoning in everyday life, as those arguments would certainly be too complex and obscure—requiring "such a subtilty and refinement of thought"[6]—for the capacity of animal minds and, indeed, human minds. The "generality of mankind"[7] cannot discover the relation of cause and effect through complex argumentation in their everyday life and actions. Working through such philosophical reasoning would be far too complicated and cumbersome if it had to be done every time one wanted to reason about some belief of fact regarding causes and effects. As well, because inferring outcomes from causes is such an important operation for the survival of all living beings, it cannot be trusted to the fallible and uncertain process of argumentation using complex reasoning, for one could all too easily make frequent mistakes if that were the case. There must be another method, "of more ready, and more general use and

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[1] Beauchamp, p. 324.
[2] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 79.
[3] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 177.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 80.
[6] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 177.
[7] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 80.

application",[8] by which this analogical reasoning of belief acquisition is performed. This other method is "custom."

"It is custom alone"[9] whereby humans and animals observe objects via their senses and use their imagination to infer a certain effect from a certain cause, resulting in the acquisition of beliefs. This custom of analogy does not involve complex, intentional reasoning. Rather, it happens automatically and unconsciously as one moves through the world. There is nothing else, says Hume, that could explain the process of reasoning about the world. It is custom, "in all the higher, as well as the lower classes"[10] of minds, that performs this operation in the imagination.

Just as we say that animals often act from 'instinct,' so too, argues Hume, is reason (arising from custom) "nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls"[11] that leads to the acquisition of our beliefs. This instinct of analogical reasoning through observation does not involve complex reasoning about ideas; rather, it acts in the mind unconsciously and unperceived. Merely by living, the mind is endowed with beliefs about the world through this unconscious instinct. And this instinct, unconscious in the human mind, is shared across all intelligent beings. Although the instincts that teach humans to avoid drowning and birds to build nests are different, they are instincts all the same.

For Hume, the actions of humans and animals have the same cause—the instinct of customary analogical reasoning about the observation of cause and effect in the world—and therefore both humans and animals possess reason. Indeed, Hume claims that no truth appears "more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men".[12] As there are many species that possess reason, there are "degrees of reason"[13] both *across* and *within* the many intelligent species. Due to the plethora of reason-possessing beings, cognition, for Hume, varies across human and nonhuman animal species by *degree*, not *kind*. Thus, because cognition varies by degree, a mind must also vary by degree rather than kind, implying that nonhuman animals have minds (though to a lesser degree than humans). The reason for this varying degree of mind, argues Hume, rests "largely on [varying degrees of] experience, memory, and causal inference".[14] Some minds, both within and between species, have experienced greater and more varied experiences than others; some minds have a larger capacity for remembering past causes; and some minds have a larger capacity for sorting out complex casual situations and making correct inferences as to the effect.[15] Thus, it is such that some humans are better at certain causal reasoning than other humans and, likewise, some nonhuman animals are better at certain causal reasoning than some other nonhuman animals and even some humans (either because the human is lacking or impaired, or because the animal possesses some superior faculties, such as smell or vision). Therefore,

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[8] Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 80.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., p. 81.
[11] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 179.
[12] Ibid., p. 176.
[13] Beauchamp, p. 327.
[14] Ibid., p. 326.
[15] Hume, *Enquiry*, pp. 80–82.

according to Hume, nonhuman animals possess intelligence and minds; and while the human species is superior to nonhuman animals in these respects, it is so "in degrees only, not in kind – and in some members only, not in all members".[16]

III. Plant Behaviour

Plants exhibit behaviour that is active and intentional toward specific goals. This is done by acquiring and understanding information about the environment the plant is situated in, and then acting on the basis of that information. Nonhuman animals and humans are considered to be behaving "if they actively resist the push and pull of the environment […] and exhibit variation in the direction of persistent movement".[17] This definition also applies to plant behaviour. Two key cognitive abilities enable plants to behave in adaptive and flexible ways: (1) memory and (2) intelligent decision-making. These cognitive abilities allow plants to behave intelligently in regard to three behaviours of primary and significant importance to the plant's ability to thrive: (1) moving and foraging, (2) mating and germinating, and (3) defensive behaviours.

The first key cognitive ability of plants is memory, as it is highly probable that "memory is essential in all plant behaviours".[18] Plants can remember the stress and impacts that various external phenomena afflict on them: temperature, water salinity, drought, light intensity, mineral imbalances in the soil, disease, and predation "can be remembered and influence"[19] future behaviours of that individual plant. And this information can be passed on to other nearby plants as well as to future generations of plants. Plants can have both short and long-term memories. Some memories are retained and influence behaviour years after the initial event, such as memories regarding adapting to periods of drought. Others are relatively more short-term, as with the Venus flytrap, which requires the stimulation of two hairs within 40 seconds of each other in order for the trap to close—the stimulation of a single hair is remembered for at least 40 seconds.[20]

The importance of memory is significant, as "[n]o wild plant could survive without some memory"[21] of both the signals it is presently receiving from its environment and past sensory signals. In this way, plants "anticipate future conditions by accurately perceiving and responding to reliable environmental cues".[22] For example, certain plants need to know when to drop their leaves for winter. This is known by combining current sensory inputs regarding stimuli, such as the air temperature and amount of sunlight, with past knowledge of what those sensory inputs mean with regard to the onset of winter.

In the utilization of memory, plants perform the second key cognitive ability: intelligent decision-making. The biological goal of any living organism is to survive

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[16] Beauchamp, p. 327.
[17] Trewavas, p. 608.
[18] Ibid., p. 611.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Karban, p. 727.

and pass on their genetic material. Thus, any individual plant seeks its "optimal fitness"[23] in order to maximize their chances of survival and reproduction. However, plants, like all other organisms, face challenges to their survival and fitness. Living in a natural environment is a dangerous and complicated endeavour, which is why humans build structures to shield and separate ourselves from the natural environment. For plants, these challenges and threats include wind, rain, temperature, and predators, which can all vary greatly from day-to-day. These complex and ever-changing problems require "intelligent solutions",[24] arrived at through cost benefit analysis and decision-making. A plant's utilization of stored information in memory combined with present sensory inputs "leads to problem solving [and] successful adaptive responses",[25] which therefore leads to greater chances of optimal fitness and survival for the plant. Factors such as the amount of rainfall, the locations of mineral-rich soil, damage by disease and predators, and the proximity of other plants result in the need to make cost-benefit analyses as to where the plant's limited resources ought to be allocated in order to maximize its potential for flourishing. "Trade-offs of resources are known to occur"[26] in order to maximize a plant's health, with resources being shifted between different parts of the plant (such as the roots, shoots, and flowers) based on changing environmental conditions. Plants that can select the optimal places for root growth based on nutritive resources, that cut-off resources to leaves and branches that "no longer provide adequate resource-gathering potential",[27] and that better predict future resource availability or dangers, possess greater intelligence and problem-solving abilities than other plants. These more intelligent plants are rewarded with "a likely gain in fitness"[28] and greater chance of survival via natural selection. Memory and cost-benefit decision-making allow plants to behave intelligently in their movement and foraging for food. Through the use of memory and learning, plants alter "their behaviours depending upon their previous experiences or the experiences of their parents"[29] or other nearby plants. This allows plants to move intelligently, such as when the leaves of legumes "rapidly fold up"[30] if disturbed or wounded. Not only do the wounded leaves fold, but so do the neighbouring (untouched and unwounded) leaves, as the plant has perceived danger nearby.

It is when plants are foraging for food that some of their most intelligent decision-making influences their movements. While seeking to determine the optimal way to acquire soil nutrients, water, and sunlight, plants "place [their] leaves and roots non-randomly […] [allowing] them to actively modify their acquisition of essential nutrients".[31] In these decisions of placement, plants move slowly, via growth, as opposed to the immediate movement which would be observed in a

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[23] Trewavas, p. 606.

[24] Ibid., p. 613.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Karban, p. 727.

[30] Ibid., p. 728.

[31] Ibid.

decision-making animal. However, a plant "may reverse its commitment to invest in one direction […] and redirect its growth elsewhere"[32] if external conditions change or the initial investment turns out to be poor. This ability of a plant to alter the course of the growth of its extensions in a deliberate manner demonstrates decision making through the use of memory and intelligent cost-benefit analysis.

Memory and intelligent decision-making also allow plants to behave intelligently when mating and in germination. In response to external factors, plants alter their reproductive behaviour. For example, some plants that do not get pollinated will increase their investment in the production of the rewards that attract pollinators; plants that are in conditions unfavourable to pollination may change to producing non-opening, self-pollinating flowers; some plants that do not get pollinated are able to shift from being single-flowering to multi-flowering; plants can alter their gender, as stress generally causes plants to increase investment in male flowers while abundant access to nutrients causes plants to increase investment in female reproduction; and plants can selectively choose to re-grow or abandon damaged portions of reproductive tissues.[33] These are all adaptive responses of mating behaviour resulting from environmental circumstances and cost-benefit analysis, allowing "successful reproduction to occur under suboptimal conditions".[34] Additionally, germination behaviour is affected by intelligent decision-making, utilizing memory and perception of the present environment. In many species of plants, rather than being a fixed mechanism, the "decision to germinate is a conditional response",[35] with the plant germinating or not germinating based on the amount of daylight hours.

Through the use of memory and intelligent decision-making, plants can perform very complex defensive behaviours in an intentional way. Plants face a plethora of challenges in their natural environments, and the "multitude of problems requires intelligent, adaptive responses".[36] Based on the "recognition of complicated patterns"[37] and subsequent intentional behaviour, certain plants can emit a different concoction of volatile chemicals in response to specific types of caterpillars eating them. These precise chemical emissions "provide detailed information that allows species-specific parasitoid wasps to locate"[38] the specific caterpillars on the plant. As well, sagebrush respond to cues released by their neighbours, "increasing their levels of resistance after a neighbour has been attacked",[39] thus demonstrating a preemptive defensive maneuver based on the assessment that an attack may happen in the near future, even though that specific plant has not yet been harmed.

These foraging, mating, and defensive actions of plants all require memory and intelligent decision-making, leading to adaptive and flexible behaviours that "are

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 730.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Trewavas, p. 613.
[37] Karban, p. 731.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

much more sophisticated than"⁴⁰ it was previously thought plants could exhibit. In responding to complex informational cues involving multiple stimuli, plants "show considerable specificity in terms of recognition and reaction […] [and can] often anticipate future environmental conditions"⁴¹ and alter their behaviour accordingly. Not only do plants behave according to their environment, they also work to causally affect their environment to their advantage by communicating with other plants and organisms around them. These new discoveries lead to new conclusions about the intellectual capabilities of plants, as plants exhibit "behaviours that have been long thought to reside within the exclusive domain of animals".⁴²

IV. Extending David Hume's Analogical Argument for Nonhuman Animal Minds to Plants

Hume's argument for nonhuman animal minds is based on his conception that the reasoning used by humans to acquire beliefs about the world—causal reasoning from custom, using analogy of previously experienced causes and effects—is much the same as what are labelled 'instincts' in animals. Assuming that this is a very plausible conception of human reasoning, then there is great reason to think that plants possess minds; Hume's conception of causal reasoning from custom is an accurate description of plant information gathering, memory, and intelligent decision-making, as a plant's behaviour depends "upon their previous experiences".⁴³

For Hume, before a belief can be acquired by a human, there must be some impression that is made aware to the mind, either through the senses or through memory, which is the "foundation of [the mind's] judgment".⁴⁴ Without such an impression, it is not possible for any belief about the world to be formed, as there would be no information by which to form it. The acquisition of such impressions is largely unconscious, unintentional, and unperceived by the mind. While I can certainly call certain ideas and memories into my conscious thought, I cannot control what my senses perceive—when I am awake and my eyes and ears are open, I cannot control what impressions my senses feed my mind.

Additionally, Hume argues that, in the vast majority of one's life, ideas and beliefs, which constitute one's experience of living and influence one's actions, are formed largely without any conscious input. When I see a picture hanging on a wall, for example, my eyesight acquired that impression unconsciously and unintentionally, merely by my looking in its direction. In almost the exact same instance in which my senses acquired the impression, my mind, using analogy and memories, worked it over and processed it into ideas and beliefs about the colour scheme, composition, and contents of the picture, but also of its larger meaning in

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⁴⁰Karban, p. 731.
⁴¹Ibid., p. 736.
⁴²Ibid.
⁴³Ibid., p. 272.
⁴⁴Hume, *Treatise*, p. 178.

a social context, such as 'who is in the photo?,' 'do I know them?,' 'what is taking place?,' etc. All of this constitutes my causal reasoning about the world and happens unconsciously and unintentionally, largely without my perceiving that the process is going on. Unless I stop and think about it, I do not notice the process. Because this process of reasoning about the world happens unconsciously and unintentionally, I did not have to learn how to perform the process. Rather, argues Hume, it is a natural instinct of one's mind. Because this unconscious instinct of reasoning in the mind results in one's acquisition of beliefs about the external world, which in turn drive one's actions toward favourable ends in adaptive and flexible ways, this instinct is thus the driving force of many of one's own intelligent actions.

Since what is labelled 'intelligent behaviour' in humans often occurs without conscious attention, I argue that intelligence can exist without conscious experience, and thus that animals and, indeed, plants can be shown to possess intelligence without the requirement of demonstrating consciousness (consciousness being a thorny issue that arguably no external observer can ever prove another being possesses). As we have defined mind as the seat or driving force of intelligence in a being, possessing intelligence thus brings with it the possession of a mind. In this way, Hume's argument that causal reasoning is a habitual instinct—an instinct which animals and plants also possess—is a plausible argument in favour of plant minds. For if the actions of humans, nonhuman animals, and plants derive from a process of reasoning that is very much similar, and if humans clearly have minds, then nonhuman organisms, including plants, who reason in a similar way to humans, must also possess minds of the same kind (though certainly of a different degree) as do humans.

It is clear from the preceding that plants operate along this spectrum of instinctive causal reasoning as do, Hume argues, humans and animals. Plants have been shown to "display many of the behaviours that have been long thought to reside within the exclusive domain of animals".[45] Plants can respond "to complex cues that involve multiple stimuli [with] considerable specificity in terms of recognition and reaction".[46] As such, a human knowing that they cannot breathe under water, a dog responding to its name being called, and a plant choosing the optimal location for root growth or releasing chemicals in a defensive action to attract wasps to eat caterpillars, "proceed from a reasoning that is not in itself different, nor founded on different principles".[47] All of those instances proceed from causal reasoning via custom—intelligent analysis of a situation whereby the mind has come to expect that certain causes will produce certain events and thereby intelligently reasons and acts accordingly in an adaptive and flexible manner. Therefore, to accept or find compelling Hume's theory of mind today, given the state of plant science, is also to accept or find compelling that plants possess both intelligence and a mind of the same kind as do humans. Therefore, if one accepts Hume's theory of mind today, given the state of planet science, then one must believe that both nonhuman animals as well as plants exhibit intelligent reasoning and behaviour of the same

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[45] Karban, p. 736.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Hume, *Treatise*, p. 177.

kind as do humans. Thus, to accept or find compelling Hume's theory of mind is also to accept or find compelling that plants possess both intelligence and a mind as the seat or driving force of that intelligence.

V. Conclusion

Hume argues that much of human reasoning (which we clearly identify as intelligent and having originated in a mind) comes from the same foundation as animal reasoning—instinctual and unconscious causal reasoning from observed custom in one's surroundings. As such, the process of information acquisition and decision-making that leads to adaptive and flexible (and therefore intelligent) behaviour in humans is a process also performed by animals, though to a lesser degree. Therefore, Hume argues, nonhuman animals possess intelligence and minds of the same kind and along the same spectrum as humans.

But research shows that plants also rely on a similar process of causal reasoning from custom, observing and "responding to reliable predictive cues"[48] in order to make intelligent decisions in their adaptive and flexible behaviours of foraging, reproduction, and defence. As such, Hume's theory entails that the processes of reasoning that lead to adaptive and flexible behaviours in humans, animals, and plants are all of the same kind and only vary by degree. Therefore, as humans are said with certainty to possess intelligence and minds, so to do nonhuman animals and, indeed, plants, possess intelligence and minds to varying degrees.

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[48] Karban, p. 736.

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THE POSSIBILITY OF PHILOSOPHICAL ASSERTION

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Philosophers seldom reach consensus over controversial philosophical questions; lengthy seminar discussions, years of conferences and meetings, and ever-growing literature all seem unable to resolve philosophical disputes. The deadlock might make a reasonable philosopher doubt whether there is knowledge, or even justified belief, in philosophical discussion. However, if philosophers do not have justified beliefs, let alone knowledge, of their proposed philosophical views in conversation, how can they make philosophical assertions? Can any philosophical assertion be sincere and warranted when philosophers do not outright believe what they assert and constantly violate the knowledge norm of assertions? Here, I will defend the possibility and validity of philosophical assertion by postulating that it is presupposed by philosophers that they share systematic peer disagreements, which gives philosophers the license to pretend to make assertions without violating the knowledge norm. I will then further demonstrate the licensing effect of the presupposed knowledge desert in philosophical inquiries and the role of pretense in allowing for philosophical assertion by contrasting its response with Montminy and Skolits's denial of philosophical assertion.

Keywords: assertion · knowledge norm · knowledge desert · skepticism · epistemology

Philosophers seldom reach consensus over controversial philosophical questions; lengthy seminar discussions, years of conferences and meetings, and ever-growing literature all seem unable to resolve philosophical disputes. The deadlock might make a reasonable philosopher doubt whether there is knowledge, or even justified belief, in philosophical discussion. However, if philosophers do not have justified beliefs, let alone knowledge, of their proposed philosophical views in conversation, how can they make philosophical assertions? Can any philosophical assertion be sincere and warranted when philosophers do not outright believe what they assert and constantly violate the knowledge norm of assertions? Here, I will defend the possibility and validity of philosophical assertion by postulating that it is presupposed by philosophers that they share systematic peer disagreements, which gives

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philosophers the license to pretend to make assertions without violating the knowledge norm. I will then further demonstrate the licensing effect of the presupposed knowledge desert in philosophical inquiries and the role of pretense in allowing for philosophical assertion, by contrasting its response with Montminy and Skolits's denial of philosophical assertion.

I. Difficulties of validating philosophical assertions

The recognized presence of systematic peer disagreement in philosophy excludes the availability of knowledge or doxastically justified beliefs for philosophical controversies. Philosophers, who regard themselves and their peers as roughly equivalent in intellectual competence and familiarity with the relevant evidence on the question under dispute, oftentimes share systematic disagreements that are *nonlocal*, *widespread*, and *entrenched*.[1] Philosophical disagreements are *systematic* because they are part of wider disagreements with many related matters in dispute, involve multiple dedicated groups of followers who are committed to their claims in the face of disagreement, and have persisted for some time with each side continuing to defend and advance their platform. If philosophers are to recognize the systematic nature of their peer disagreements, they would find it difficult to believe that they have knowledge or justified beliefs on the philosophical views they seek to defend and advance. It is unreasonable for philosophers to think they do. The systematic peer disagreement should constitute higher-order evidence for philosophers to cease believing that they have knowledge or doxastically justified beliefs of what they are committed to defending and advancing. The argument for this normative claim is that if p is a proposition regarding which there is systematic peer disagreement, then if S believes that p, S's belief is neither knowledgeable nor doxastically justified. No knowledge or doxastically justified belief is available in contexts of systematic peer disagreement. It is then unreasonable for anyone that recognizes the disagreement to suppose that knowledge or doxastically justified belief is available for philosophical controversies.[2]

The above skeptical argument concerning the availability of knowledge and doxastically justified beliefs in philosophical controversies may appear unconvincing to many who feel reluctant to recognize philosophical discussions as a "knowledge desert," where researchers are primarily focused on questions that they are not even close to knowing the answer to. The following example of "flipping philosophers" may help shed light on the skeptical argument that philosophers do not outright believe their controversial views in philosophy. A philosopher may constantly advocate a controversial philosophical view that he or she feels genuinely inclined to defend personally in various settings of philosophical discussion. However, the same philosopher could feel strong temptations to go with majority expert opinions rather than how things seem to him or her personally or, "flip," if actual practical consequences are tied to getting the matter right. Say that a sympathizer of incom-

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[1] Goldberg, p. 278.
[2] The arguments presented here are directly inspired by Goldberg (ibid., pp. 278–279).

patibilism is captured by aliens who ask him to answer whether incompatibilism is true or not. The aliens know the answer, and if the philosopher's answer is incorrect, the aliens will destroy the Earth. The huge practical consequence tied to the philosopher's answer would plausibly make the philosopher's answer different from what he or she gives in philosophical discussion.[3] If the philosopher outright believes or knows his or her philosophical claim, he or she will not feel such temptation to flip. It is precisely because the philosopher bears in mind that his or her philosophical view is within the context of systematic peer disagreement that the philosopher might feel the need to flip and consult the popular opinion. The doxastic attitude he or she bears toward incompatibilism, whatever that is, is not of knowledge or outright belief.[4]

If philosophical controversies under systematic peer disagreement do reside in knowledge deserts, it seems to endanger the validity and possibility of philosophical assertion. If philosophers do make philosophical assertions, they will be making them without believing or knowing what they assert, which would seemingly make their assertions insincere or unwarranted. Moreover, these assertions violate the knowledge norm of assertion, which derives from the view that assertion is governed by the norm that the speaker should know what he or she asserts. A speaker ought to assert that p only if the speaker knows that p. The arguments for the claim that philosophical assertions are unwarranted and insincere unfold as follows with a similar structure: given the premise that for any speaker S and assertion that p, S's assertion is warranted only if S justifiably believes that p, to assert matters in philosophy is unwarranted because there is no justified belief on matters in philosophy regarding which there is systematic disagreement. Similarly, given the premise that for any speaker S and assertion that p, S's assertion that p is sincere only if S believes that p; to assert matters in philosophy is insincere because propositions on matters of philosophy are unreasonable for S to believe in the face of systematic peer disagreements.[5] Could philosophical assertions survive the above three accusations that they are insincere, unwarranted, and violate the knowledge norm? On my account, the answer is positive. It seems too hasty to deprive philosophers of the ability to reasonably make assertions when dealing with philosophical controversies before further examination.

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[3] DeRose, "Do I Even Know Any of This to Be True?" P. 269.

[4] According to Keith DeRose, various philosophers have given widely diverging guesses as to what they would do in the weird relevant circumstances. This example involving aliens that seemingly kidnap philosophers for no good reasons is not aimed at offering conclusive evidence to demonstrate that philosophers who hold minority opinions will always flip in these circumstances. A more modest conclusion could well be that philosophers' awareness that there is systematic peer disagreement in the field could (and probably should) influence their reporting to the aliens in such a scenario when there is more at stake.

[5] Goldberg, pp. 279–281.

II. The licensing effect of presupposed knowledge desert

Starting from the critique that philosophical assertions violate the knowledge norm of assertion, one first needs to recognize that it is not impossible to assert that p without knowing that p. The fact that a philosopher makes a claim he or she does not know does not automatically rule the claim to be non-assertion. According to Timothy Williamson, the knowledge account "does not imply that asserting p without knowing p is a terrible crime".[6] The speaker would be at great pains if they need to verify any proposition before asserting it since they often do not know whether they know the propositions or not. As a result, speakers in many cases become relaxed in applying the knowledge rule and choose to tolerate breaches of the knowledge norm in conversations, when the breaches cease to matter so much. It will require further investigation to see how philosophical controversies qualify as such scenarios, which I will elaborate on later in this paper, but the takeaway here is that mere violation of the strict knowledge norm does not reject philosophical assertions in the context of systematic peer disagreement entirely.

While it is not wrong to assert that p without knowing that p in contexts without systematic peer disagreement, the intriguing aspect of philosophical assertions in the context of systematic peer disagreement is that it does not even seem to be an epistemic misdeed for a philosopher to make philosophical assertions that he or she does not know. The impression is that philosophers somehow have some form of "*special* license" or excuse to assert what they do not know in conversations concerning philosophical controversies.[7] To pinpoint exactly what gives philosophers license to break the knowledge norm, one has to find out what distinguishes a conversation concerning philosophical controversies from a normal conversation. For example, while it is reasonable for a philosopher to make his or her case for specific philosophical views in a seminar room, it would nevertheless be bad for the same philosopher in the room to assert that it is raining outside but he or she does not know it. Similarly, it would be wrong for this philosopher to tell his or her peer during the class that the bank is closed on Saturday morning if the philosopher does not know that. The license to break the knowledge norm of assertion, therefore, is sensitive to the subject matter of discussion. Merely being inside a seminar room of philosophical discussion itself or being a participant in the discussion does not in itself grant the license. It is granted to speakers only when the subject matter concerns philosophical controversies, or, in general, topics of knowledge deserts.

Philosophical controversies grant license for speakers to break the knowledge norm of assertion because philosophers *presuppose* that they are nowhere near getting to know the answers to these controversies or whether the solutions they provide are right or not. Such a supposition holds when philosophers who share radically different opinions on philosophical matters actively debate each other in the same seminar room. However, even if everybody in a particular conversation happens to hold the same view, the supposition is still at work, since everyone is

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[6] Williamson, p. 258.
[7] DeRose, "Do I Even Know Any of This to Be True?" P. 274.

aware of a larger group outside of the room who dispute their fleeting consensus. Furthermore, if a limited group of philosophers working on a new question happen to reach consensus across the board, the supposition that they are nowhere near getting to know the answer could still hold, as long as it is reasonable for this cohort of philosophers to expect disagreement if more philosophers come to work on this problem. The idea is that this supposition is presupposed, either to recognize existing systematic peer disagreement or to expect potential systematic peer disagreement, whether there is peer disagreement in the particular conversation or not.

When speakers talk to each other about subject matters that they presuppose to be free of systematic peer disagreements, it is common ground that knowledge and justified beliefs are available concerning the subject matter. Therefore, the knowledge norm is upheld by the speakers to be the default conversational setting, and violations of the norm subsequently constitute epistemic misdeeds. When speakers presuppose that knowledge and justified beliefs are not available, however, it would be unreasonable for any speaker to expect the other conversational parties to abide by the knowledge norm and assert only what they know as long as they still want to have a discussion. The speakers presuppose that knowledge and doxastically justified beliefs are not available for questions regarding which there is systematic peer disagreement, that the other conversational parties also presuppose that they are unavailable and that the other conversational parties presuppose their presuppositions as well, etc. This common belief that philosophical questions subject to systematic peer disagreement are a knowledge desert, together with some form of presupposition that philosophical discussions could help advance the investigation of philosophical topics, gives license to philosophers to make assertions without knowing them. The fact that philosophers presuppose that there are systematic peer disagreements concerning philosophical investigations allows philosophers to breach the knowledge norm of assertion and talk as if they know.

While the presupposition that knowledge and justified beliefs are not available for philosophical controversies could explain how philosophers receive license to deviate from the knowledge norm of assertion, one might argue that many philosophers are simply not convinced by the skeptical conclusion that knowledge and justified beliefs are not available for philosophical controversies and that they do know or believe justifiably the philosophical views they uphold. If they remain unconvinced of this skeptical conclusion, there is no way that the presupposition of unavailability of knowledge is part of the common ground shared by these philosophers. Some may argue that they have fairly good reasons to dispute the skeptical conclusion, considering the self-undermining feature of most skeptical arguments. If every philosophical controversy involving systematic peer disagreement should be regarded as a knowledge desert, the philosophical controversy on this very skeptical argument could be susceptible to systematic peer disagreement as well. Therefore, it is unreasonable for any philosopher to think that they know that any philosophical controversy belongs to a knowledge desert if he or she ever gets convinced by this skeptical argument. If this is indeed the case, no one should reasonably presuppose that knowledge and justified beliefs are not available for philosophical controversies.

I have two responses to this form of objection. First, while some philosophers may claim that knowledge and justified beliefs involving philosophical controversies could be available, they will oftentimes flip once they are further questioned about whether they know or believe the philosophical viewpoints they are committed to defending in philosophical discussions. Questions such as "how do you know that?" and "but do you know that?", which I consider conversationally appropriate responses to a philosopher who claims to know or justifiably believe the philosophical views they defend, oftentimes lead them to concede that they are not confident about the assertions they make. The second point in reply to this objection is that it is only reasonable for these philosophers to concede that they do not know their controversial philosophical views if they are to recognize the systematic peer disagreement over philosophical controversies. In this aspect, the above explanation of conversational license to breach the knowledge norm is not only descriptive, it is *normative*. If philosophers do recognize that there are systematic peer disagreements over philosophical controversies, it is only reasonable for them to stop thinking that they know or justifiably believe their philosophical views. It then becomes reasonable for them to presuppose that other philosophers will do the same and that it is now the default common ground that knowledge and doxastically justified beliefs are not available for philosophical controversies. Therefore, they are now licensed to make philosophical assertions as if they know, given that it is reasonable for them to presuppose that philosophical controversies are a knowledge desert.

Finally, I want to raise an interesting example, in contrast, to further elaborate on how the conversational norms of philosophical discussions develop. In *Zero Dark Thirty*, a movie about the US government's manhunt for Bin Laden, there is a scene in which the CIA Director and several other officials meet to discuss whether Bin Laden is in the compound they previously managed to locate in Pakistan. The CIA director asks whether Bin Laden "is there or not," and the deputy director answers first. "We don't deal in certainty," he says. "We deal in probability. I'd say there's a sixty percent probability he's there." All of the officials then proceed to rate how probable they think Bin Laden is in the compound, a tradition that is rumored to be established after their intelligence failure about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It seems to be common ground in the CIA meeting that no one knows whether Bin Laden is in the Pakistan compound or not. However, the positions the officials defend are put under great scrutiny in this war room because these decisions have massive geopolitical consequences. This is not the case in the seminar rooms of philosophy. Philosophers may preface their statements with "this is a little controversial" when presenting their views in an introductory philosophy course, however, they are in no way required by their peers to rate how probable they think their philosophical views are whenever they make a contested philosophical claim. The default norm governing the philosophical conversations seems to be that philosophers are allowed to make controversial claims, partly because of the general truth that the speakers are not omniscient beings and partly because there is usually little at stake. There is no military operation of manhunt to launch or extraterrestrial threat to destroy the Earth. Philosophers, in turn, take advantage

of the default norm, whose permissiveness allows them to take advantage of the relaxed application of the knowledge norm and make declarative propositions. In addition, philosophers do not hold their peers to commit a huge conversational crime when they assert something that they do not know, even if some of them do not agree with the skeptical recognition that gives them life. They may believe differently but they act as if it is true that no one knows what they are talking about. In other words, they may not *believe* it, but they *accept* it (in a Stalnakerian sense where to accept that p is to act as if p is true in conversation), and that is enough for the skeptical recognition to break into the common ground.

III. Montminy and Skolits's denial of philosophical assertions

It might be helpful to see how my account differs from other accounts that deny the possibility of philosophical assertion altogether. The account I will consider in relation to my account is developed by Montminy and Skolits (henceforth "M&S"). M&S explore the question of whether philosophical utterances count as assertions when addressing the factivity problem of contextualism. According to M&S, there is an implicit understanding among speakers that speakers do not represent themselves as knowing the content of every utterance they make since many of the philosophical claims made are highly controversial and cannot be established decisively. Therefore, utterances expressing controversial philosophical views have "weaker assertoric forces than assertions do," which would be somewhere "in between the force of a conjecture and that of an assertion".[8] M&S then proceed to argue that philosophical conversations are not governed by the knowledge norm since weak assertives are governed by a weaker epistemic requirement that p is epistemically appropriate only if the speaker has some evidence for p.[9] Therefore, controversial philosophical utterances are not assertions but only weak assertives. They are not subject to the knowledge norm, but a weaker epistemic requirement.

It is disputable whether philosophers try to represent themselves as knowing what they say in a seminar room at all. Given the implicit supposition that no one knows for certain what they are talking about, it seems impossible for anyone to *successfully* represent themselves as knowing their utterances or convince the addressees that he or she knows. However, it is a mistake for M&S to confuse a doomed failure of trying with not trying at all. As Williamson notes, in many circumstances "[speakers] try to obey the knowledge rule, but we do not try very hard".[10] This is especially the case when the speakers already presuppose that no one knows anything, or even have warranted beliefs, about these philosophical controversies. There is little motivation for the speakers to try hard to represent themselves as knowing when they presuppose that their efforts will not succeed. However, speakers do try after all. They do so with a level of pretense and talk as if

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[8]Montminy and Skolits, p. 327.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Williamson, p. 259.

they know. As long as the speakers are still trying, the knowledge norm of assertion is still in operation.

While the above analysis demonstrates that the speakers still try to represent themselves as knowing, it is important to review M&S's arguments for the claim that they are not. M&S have two general points in support of their denial of philosophical assertions. First, it is conversationally inappropriate to challenge speakers who make philosophical utterances with questions such as "Do you know that?" or "How you know?"[11] Second, the assertoric force of the utterances is weaker than assertion, so they are not assertions. To the first argument, in my opinion, it *is* conversationally appropriate to ask such a question whenever a speaker makes an unhedged philosophical claim, and it is equally conversationally appropriate for the speaker to in turn to defend his or her claim. This conflicting intuition in contradiction to M&S's speculation is shared at least by Keith DeRose, who reported that he "heard such challenges often in the settings in question" without ever finding them inappropriate.[12]

However, additional support is needed to show that such questions are conversationally appropriate than mere reports of conflicting intuitions. M&S mistakenly regard such challenges to unhedged philosophical claims as inappropriate because they mistakenly draw an inappropriate analogy between unhedged philosophical claims and weak assertives generated by a parenthetical use of "I think." M&S believes that the illocutionary force of unhedged philosophical claims will be "comparable in strength to that of the weak assertives generated by a parenthetical use of 'I think'".[13] As a result, because M&S thinks that the question "Do you know that?" is inappropriate for the utterance "I think [Denise] is in her office" prefaced by "I think." They argue that "similarly, it seems inappropriate to challenge an interlocutor who argues for, say, compatibilism about free will, moral cognitivism or epistemic contextualism, by asking, 'Do you know that?' or 'How do you know?'".[14] The distinction that M&S draw between asking Sally who uttered "I think [Denise] is in her office" and "Do you know that?," which they regard as inappropriate, and asking her "What are your reasons for thinking that?," which they grant to be appropriate, is not a result of the weak assertoric force of Sally's utterance. Instead, it results from the fact that her utterance is prefaced by a parenthetical use of "I think." To hedge an utterance with "I think" implies a clear sign to disobey the knowledge norm and resort to a weaker assertive of speculation, conjecture, and guesses, etc. In other words, "I think" conveys a signal from the speaker to give up trying to obey the knowledge rule. In contrast, an unhedged philosophical utterance does not convey such a message. The speaker, without hedging its utterance, still tries to represent him or herself as knowing and pretends to talk as if he or she knows. Therefore, even if unhedged philosophical statements of systematic peer disagreement have the same slightly weaker assertoric force as weak

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[11] Montminy and Skolits, p. 328.

[12] DeRose, "Do I Even Know Any of This to Be True?" P. 274.

[13] Montminy and Skolits, p. 327.

[14] Ibid., p. 328.

assertions, it is wrong to draw on this similarity to conclude that it is inappropriate to challenge them with questions such as "how do you know that?".

How does one account for the supposedly weak assertoric force of these philosophical utterances pointed out by M&S, if they are to remain assertions? A seemingly promising way to explain the weak assertoric force of philosophical utterances is to apply contextualism to the knowledge account of assertion. If what counts as knowledge is a context-variable matter, the context-variability in what the speakers are positioned to assert is just what the knowledge account of assertion would lead us to expect. A relativized knowledge account of assertion would then argue that a speaker is well-enough positioned with respect to p to be able to properly assert that p if and only if the speaker knows that p according to the standards for knowledge that are in place as the speaker makes the assertion.[15] Therefore, one might feel inclined to argue that in the case of philosophical investigation, the standard for knowledge is so low that it becomes easier for philosophers to make assertions, which account for the relatively weak assertoric force of philosophical utterances that correspond to the low epistemic standards that are in place as the speakers make the assertions. In my opinion, such an explanation is misplaced. First, lively seminar discussions on philosophical matters are philosophically famous for being a place of notoriously high epistemic standards. It is counterintuitive for any argument to suppose that philosophical investigations are of low epistemic standards to allow for philosophical assertions. Second, the presupposed skeptical argument that philosophical controversies of systematic peer disagreement reside in knowledge deserts denies the possibility of attaining knowledge no matter how low the knowledge standard is. If even justified beliefs, let alone knowledge, are unavailable in philosophical controversies, it is not enough to save the project by simply lowering the knowledge standard to allow for assertions. If it is indeed the case that philosophers do not know what they are talking about, this claim should hold in a context-invariable manner.

Lively seminar discussions all involve a certain commonly accepted level of pretense when the speakers make their controversial philosophical assertions. Participants of these discussions accept that these inquiries take place in knowledge deserts, that the speakers speak as if they know, that the speakers pretend to obey the knowledge norm of assertions, and that they keep breaking them without blinking an eye.[16] Such pretense remains benign, accepted, and welcomed since there is not much at stake in most of these seminar discussions and it allows for more effective and constructive discussions.[17] However, it certainly does not mean that the speakers can just assert whatever they like given the allowed level of pretense. Much like actors and actresses who pretend to make assertions in play are still subject to

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[15] DeRose, *The Case for Contextualism: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context*, p. 99.

[16] Again, I am here using the term accept in the Stalnakerian sense, namely that a speaker accepts that p if and only if the speaker acts as if that p is true.

[17] There have to be some practical/epistemic benefits of allowing such a level of pretense in philosophical discussions. The pretense may save philosophers unnecessary cost of communication to hedge all their philosophical statements. The pretense may be what allows for reasonable discussions that advance philosophical investigations in the first place since without it no one should and would assert anything that they do not know.

particular conversational norms, speakers in philosophical disputes are too subject to conversational norms. It is still bad writing if a character in a play utters "It is raining outside but I do not believe it." And, similarly, it is still unacceptable if a speaker utters a philosophical view that he or she does not even find to be defensible. As long as they make assertions and pretend to know, they still represent themselves at least as obliged to defend their positions.

Important evidence of the presence of such a level of pretense in philosophical discussions is that most of the time it is natural for the conversational participants to choose to "opt-out" of such consensual pretense of philosophical discussions. A skeptic could easily confess that he or she does not believe that he or she does not have hands without committing any horrendous crime of violating the knowledge norm of assertion. A no-distinction monist, who advocates that there is only one thing in the world without any distinction, could admit that he does have one pencil and one rubber on his desk and that they are distinct things. This option to opt-out much resembles how actors and actresses could opt-out of their characters in a play, and the assumed level of pretense allows them to do so. As a result, the accepted pretense helps account for the slightly weak assertoric forces of philosophical assertions. Philosophical assertions are assertions as long as the pretense holds among the participants of the conversation. However, the pretense also weakens their assertoric forces, because after all everyone more or less accepts that no one *really* knows what they are talking about.[18]

IV. Conclusion

It remains to be seen how the above argument appealing to the common ground's licensing effect and accepted pretense can help explain why philosophical assertions can be *warranted* and *sincere*. Like how they allow for breaches of the knowledge norm of assertion, the presupposition among philosophers that knowledge and doxastically justifiable beliefs are not available allows them to pretend to make sincere and warranted assertions. Of course, the speakers could be genuinely sincere if they feel inclined to embrace the view that they advocate for. However, the takeaway is that these philosophical assertions appear sincere even if the speaker admits that he or she does not know it or has justified beliefs about it. As long as conversational parties still want to and think it is reasonable to advance philosophical discussions despite the systematic peer disagreement, it is reasonable for them to keep pretending. Philosophers, therefore, could make sincere and warranted assertions even if they do not justifiably believe them in the face of systematic disagreement.

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[18] A worry is that by introducing pretense into philosophical discussions I may sabotage the sincerity many philosophers bear and cherish when they enthusiastically defend their philosophical views. That I am advocating a completely mercenary view of philosophical discussions where speakers assert philosophical views that they find defensible but do not sincerely feel inclined to uphold. It is entirely possible for any philosopher to be a complete mercenary with regards to his or her philosophical views. The picture I am advocating here is totally compatible with philosophers rooting for the philosophical views they genuinely feel attracted by. The presumably accepted pretense is only utilized by the speakers to allow for assertions in knowledge deserts.
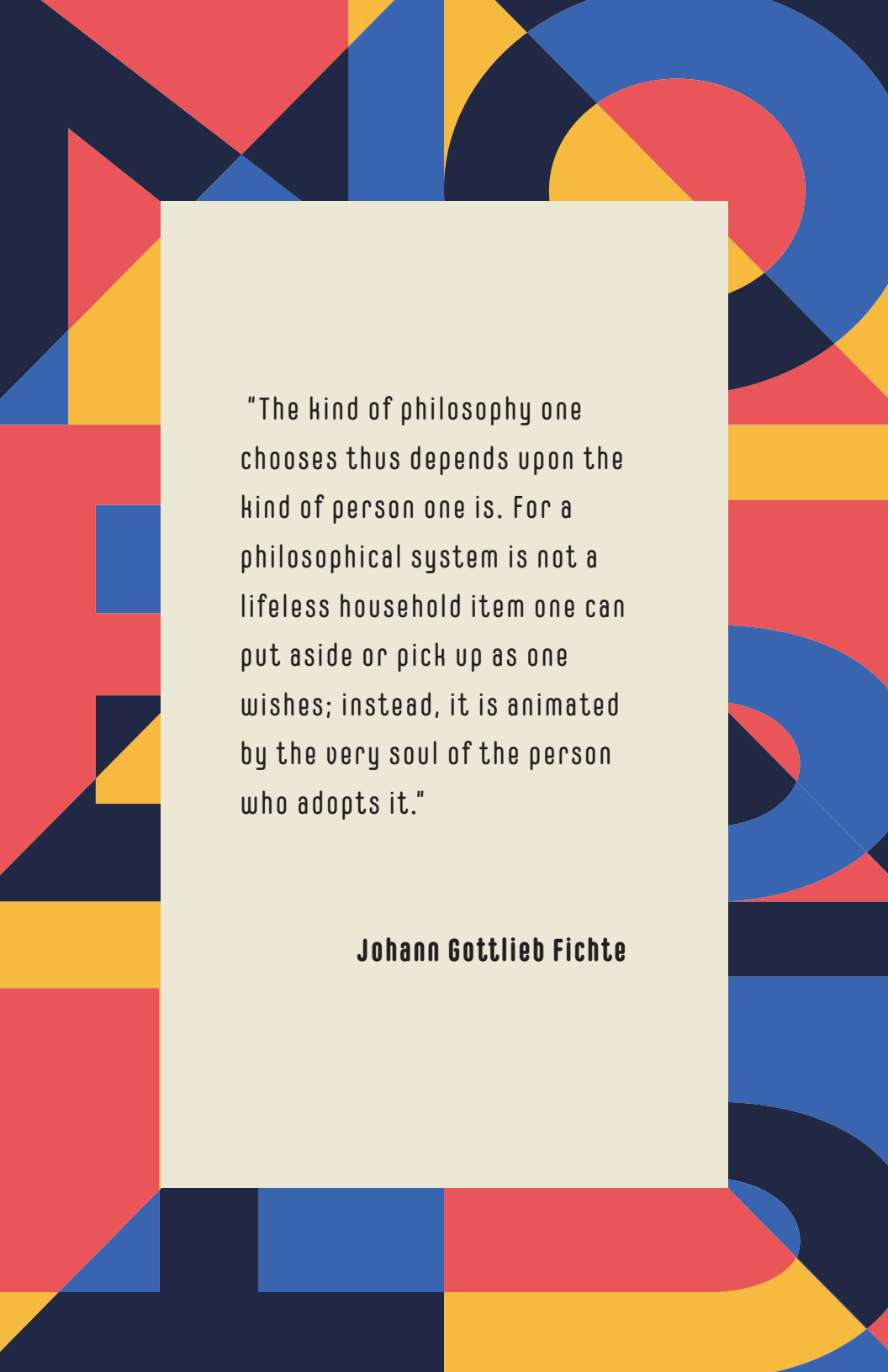
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"The kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends upon the kind of person one is. For a philosophical system is not a lifeless household item one can put aside or pick up as one wishes; instead, it is animated by the very soul of the person who adopts it."

Johann Gottlieb Fichte