The Journal for Interdisciplinary Theology

Creations and Beginnings

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Creations and Beginnings

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Contents

Introduction

Giorgia O'Donoghue

> Open-ended study, partial understanding, and personal knowing are not only inevitable consequences of human finitude but also the pride of humanistic study.

Creations and Beginnings is a somewhat on-the-nose title for this Journal's first publication – this is both a new creation and it is just beginning with this first issue. Nevertheless, there is much more to this choice of theme than just irony. Throughout religious traditions, creation stories, stories of beginnings and rebirths, are fundamental to the composition of the religion. Moreover, the act of participating in scholarly examination that sparks new interpretations and contributions of a field of study is both a moment of creation and beginning. Interdisciplinary intercourse is a fertile ground for such new explorations. As individuals bring together unique combinations of academic specialisms, the scholarly world becomes broader, brighter, and more prosperous. In 2014, the Mellon Working Group on Religion and Literature published 'Literature and Religion for the Humanities: Seven Theses.' The group's aim, in conjunction with The University of Notre Dame, was to explore the integration of religious studies into several other core humanities disciplines. The aim was to 'help advance this dimension of the humanities, both substantively and programmatically.' (1) While the publication's focus is specifically on the relationship between religion and literature, there is much that can be taken away from its findings. Specifically, the three theses below:

  The study of Religion and Literature can reveal the potential and limitations of contemporary habits of thought. (2)
  The study of Religion and Literature may affirm that open-ended study, partial understanding, and personal knowing are not only inevitable consequences of human finitude but also the pride of humanistic study. (3)
  The study of Religion and Literature should foster ethical encounter and sympathetic expansion. (4)

This approach to academia, where the 'acquisition of evermore specialised knowledge' gives way to an approach that prioritises open-ended, partial, and personal knowing, is fundamental to the *Journal for Interdisciplinary Theology*'s ethos. (5) We seek to embrace the potential of interdisciplinary discourse in facilitating this partial and personal knowledge that is no less academically rigorous, no less scholarly and contributes equally to the humanities disciplines. The journal's core aim is to aid the exploration of the theology and religious studies field through interdisciplinary dialogue.

I first began to engage truly with this type of discourse through the artwork of Barnet Newman. Newman's 1946 piece, *Moment*, provides a unique opportunity to engage with this type of interdisciplinary discussion in the manner in which the *Journal for Interdisciplinary Theology* wishes to continue. (6) With *Moment*, there is a feeling of observing something, a split second before an event, an explosion or even destruction. The band of yellows centred in the middle of the painting, its intensity, difficult to miss, appears to be penetrating through the mix of browns, greens and whites that engulf the rest of the work. It is almost as if pure light is about to escape through it.

It is standing on this almost liminal edge, *before* an occurrence, that my mind is always first drawn to significant events in physics, like the Big Bang or an implosion of a star (I have always been fascinated with these events from early childhood). It feels as if there is an energy straining to be released within *Moment*. Secondly, and more prominently, it must be said, I am drawn to the biblical Creation Narrative; the feeling of liminality in observing something the split second before an occurrence does not change but is rather heightened with feelings of transcendence and the sublime. Within this abstract painting, I see the beginning of something new but also a sense of suspension, a moment that has been caught or captured before something happens, like the nanoseconds before a chemical reaction. This combination of experiences was solidified for me when I first saw *Moment* in person at TATE; its dimension and where it hung made it easy to miss if you were not looking. Nevertheless, Newman's creation is mighty.

Newman's essay, *The Sublime is Now*, is such a well-known and illuminating piece of writing, and a sense of the sublime is something I cannot help but feel when looking at Moment; tension and foreboding come with the feeling of overwhelming greatness that characterises the sublime, and this is keenly felt within the unexpressed energy in *Moment*. It almost seems amiss calling this work not beautiful, but I am sure Newman would not be upset with this. The colour palette of browns and yellows, rather than the more intense white and black, darkness and light, creates an overall natural, earthy element within *Moment* that intertwines yet another element of creation within its narrative. One might argue that a monochromatic colour pallet may intensify the expression of the balance between potential and actual energy in *Moment*. I would be inclined to disagree; there is a sense of texture, of touch, in the way the pale yellows of the oil paint are beginning to 'crack' or 'seep' through the brown on the canvas that is altogether more foreboding. Whatever was coming for us from within the canvas was coming imminently if it were not now kept in a state of suspension. The focus in *Moment* is on what could be rather than the aesthetic of the beautiful.

In *The Sublime is Now*, Newman says of Abstract Expressionism and art in the United States:

> We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or 'life,' we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. (7)

I feel free of these 'impediments' when looking at Moment because it feels like I am holding my breath, waiting for something monumental to happen. I am uneasy looking at Moment still; but it is an unease that is not uncomfortable. *The Journal for Interdisciplinary Theology* is a place for experimental forms of academic writing – in fact, it is greatly encouraged by the editors. Unease, curiosity, and, above all, questioning will always have a place within this publication.

Endnotes

1. University of Notre Dame, 'Mellon Initiative on Religion Across the Disciplines', https://rmellon.nd.edu/ [Accessed: 25 November 2023].
2. Mellon Working Group on Religion and Literature, 'Literature and Religion for the Humanities: Seven Theses' in *Religion & Literature,* 46, (2014), pp.151-155, (p.152).
3. ibid., p.153
4. ibid., p.154
5. ibid., p.152
6. Barnet Newman, *Moment*, (1946), Oil Paint on Canvas, (762 × 406 mm), Tate.
7. Barnett Newman, 'The Sublime is Now,' in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000; an Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2002), p.582

The Creational Gaze: Affinities and Hermeneutical Implications between Marina Abramović's *The Artist is Present* and Galatians 5:22–25

Isaiah Morris

Art can be a text *of* theology, and art can be a text *for* theology, Theologian Richard Viladesau argues. (1) Following his cue, this paper will embrace as a text *for* theology *The Artist is Present* (2010), performed by contemporary artist Marina Abramović. In particular, this work of art will serve as a hermeneutical lens for reading Galatians 5-6, developing the contours for what could be akin to a theology of the gaze or the creational gaze. Our focus will be on Gal. 5:22–25, with reference to Paul's remarks on the new creation in 6:15. Whilst Viladesau restricts the notion of 'Christian art' as dependent on scriptures for its visual content, this paper follows his later observation that "The transcendental for us is always somehow embodied, mediated concretely and historically." (2) Abramović aptly follows this latter description of being a mediator of the transcendent, or "Priestess",(3) arguably giving precedence for the conversation with non-explicitly 'Christian artworks' as representative of the "transcendental for us". There is a growing argument for using religion as an optic for understanding performance art and, (4) similarly, a bourgeoning interest in the interdisciplinary conversation of art, theology, and biblical studies, to which this paper seeks to contribute. (5) Through Abramović and *The Artist is Present*, the act of gazing and the holding of attention gives focus toward a particular thing. Her contribution to the act of seeing will be our key to reading Galatians and deriving a creational gaze.

For Paul, the Spirit informs the fruit of the new creation (5:22-23), which comes by following the Spirit. Thus, following the Spirit is participation in the New Creation (6:15). We will further develop this argument in two preliminary and circumambient sections before they coalesce. Initially, we will explore Galatians in its context and specificity pertaining to 5:22-25. Secondly, unpacking the religious and historical dimensions of Marina Abramović, before highlighting a few critical implications of The Artist is Present. Finally, through Paul and Abramović as interlocuters, Galatians and The Artist is Present, it will be apparent that keeping in step with the Spirit is a call to gaze upon the Spirit, which has theological implications for how we conceive of creating. But first, to Paul.

Galatians 5:22-25 in context

The book of Galatians is one of Paul's earliest letters; the most convincing date is between AD 48-49. (6) The letter's literary context preceding 5:22 is as follows:

From the outset, Paul denounces those trying to confuse the Galatians, mainly the Gentiles, by perverting the gospel of Christ. The general scenario is that Christian-Jewish missionaries had arrived in Galatia seeking to "complete" Paul's gospel through circumcision as heirs of Abraham, now fully 'under the law'. (7) In other words, the identity of this community revolved around circumcision and its necessity; Craig Keener notes that Jews considered it a betrayal to treat half-converted Gentiles as God's people. (8) Therefore, Paul is arguing against those who see the need to "stay in" salvation through the law; instead, and significant for our passage, which we will soon explore, is that Paul argues they "stay in" Christ's salvation by walking in step with the Spirit. (9) Paul sees this community's identity as marked by keeping in step with the Spirit; the missionaries see it as formulated through circumcision. Put simply, Paul is writing to clarify on what basis this burgeoning Jewish sect stays in their salvation which they see as having been achieved through Jesus Christ. (10)

Briefly, Paul begins with a greeting before rebuking them for accepting a different gospel than what they had initially accepted (1:9). To this, he asks if he is trying to win the approval of human beings. (1:10). Paul says he received this message through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Then speaking of his conversion and early travels, his defence of the gospel in Antioch, he proceeds to define this gospel. This gospel finds its salvation in Jesus Christ, who gave himself to us in love; therefore, we ought to put our faith in the faith of Christ, not righteousness gained through the law (2:15-21).

Asking if they received the Spirit through the law or their belief in this gospel, he evidences Abraham, who was called righteous before the law. He appeals by looking to the past; their slavery, and Paul's relationship to them; and then declaring that they are children of the promise —those Gentiles who, through faith, receive Abrahamic blessing (3:7-29; 4:21-31).

He then locates it all occurring in Christ, who set them free (4:1-14; 5:1-6). Paul then speaks on this new life.

Galatians 5:22-5:25 (NIV)
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things, there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)

Fundamentally this new life is patterned by serving each other in love, which emerges through the redirection of passions toward Christ, and by faithfully walking with the Spirit. Near the end of Galatians, Paul notes that what really matters is the new creation (6:15); the new creation thus finds its seeds and content in 5:22-24. (11) Paul, then, further heightens this dichotomy by later, in 6:15, saying that both circumcision and uncircumcision are meaningless in the light of this new inbreaking Christ reality. He is not diminishing the meaningfulness of the law (3:24), but because of Christ, something akin to a superabundance of meaning has occurred. Thus, characteristic of the new creation is the absence of law but the pervasiveness of the Spirit's fruit. Therefore, the fruit of the Spirit must be the tangible abundance of meaning sprouting in individual and communal life. (12) The fruit is not an object to hold. The fruit is the outworking of behaviour modelled after Christ, who was crucified for love (2:20). By associating intimately with Christ's crucifixion, "the Christian life is a cruciformed existence", allowing greater autonomy for the Spirit to bear fruit in the life of believers. (13) The hallmark identity of someone belonging to Christ is the fruit of the Spirit, cultivated through participating in, and living by, the Spirit. (14)

What does it mean to say "since we live by the Spirit" (v.25a)? Throughout Galatians, Paul describes how the Spirit produces traits of Christ's kingdom. Paul is explaining the fundamental reality characterising this community—only by the Spirit will this come to pass. (15) Philip Graham Ryken helpfully sees this as we put our sinful nature to death whilst "being revived by the Holy Spirit." (16)
Translations often begin with "since we live", but this is the wrong emphasis, mistranslating the protasis and diminishing Paul's rhetorical potency. (17) Instead, translating it as "If we live…" asks a question: am I living by the Spirit? Further clarifying why Paul says in 3:3, "are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (NIV). So, Paul asks, "If we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." But what does it mean to "keep in step"?
The Greek term stoichōmen, roughly translated to "keeping in step", is militant language. (18) Soldiers upholding discipline would form files to keep their formation.

When soldiers ran, all they had to worry about was keeping in step. If a fellow soldier fell, the crew surrounding helped them back on their feet. (19) Similarly, for Paul's audience, he is saying that you work out your Christian life together by listening to and looking toward the Spirit. (20) This keeping in step harkens back to Paul's desire for them to trust Jesus Christ (3:11-12) through the help of the Holy Spirit. (21) The preceding verses clarify how we know we are actively keeping in step with the Spirit: we are making room in our nature by crucifying our old flesh in Christ, allowing the fruit of the Spirit to change us. This fruit, as he mentioned, is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (5:22-23), presumably becoming their rubric for asking if someone is "in step with the Spirit".

In short, three themes are dominant and pertinent to our analysis. First, this inbreaking reality is available for all; it does not necessitate physical identity markers such as circumcision to determine you as part of the "ingroup"; instead, it is through a life lived cruciform. Second, the cruciform life is lived with a gaze toward the Spirit. (22) This community garners its identity when its horizon is the Spirit and cruciform Christ. Finally, the community can determine if someone is gazing toward the Spirit because they inevitably perform the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, Paul suggests that anyone can be a part of this community, but the normative behaviours are developed in light of the Spirit and look like a life lived in love. Before articulating what a "creational gaze" is, we will now explore Marina Abramović, and *The Artist is Present.*

Marina Abramović and *The Artist is Present*

Marina Abramović is a contemporary performance artist and one of the most significant. Born November 30, 1946, Abramović grew up in Post-war Communist Yugoslavia, living with her grandmother until she was six. Reflecting on her early childhood, she fondly remembers her grandmother's various rituals and rhythms; at its centre was her grandmother's religious devotion to Christianity via the Serbian Orthodox church. They would attend church every day. (23) Abramović would garner her first taste of embodied performance at the Orthodox church. (24) She would have encountered: holy smells; the importance of touch through the relics; the reverberations of the priest's chants; the necessity of beholding the various icons; and the essentiality of taste in partaking in the Eucharist. (25) Abramović's early aesthetic encounter with sensuous ritualisation mediated in the Serbian Orthodox Church would go unconnected in her memoir *Walk Through Walls*. Still, the connection is somewhat blatant when surfaced. (26)

   By age seven, Abramović knew she wanted to be an artist. (27) The poetry of Rilke and Eastern spirituality—Buddhism, Sufism, and Shamanism—would influence her most profoundly. (28) In her early painting *Three Secrets* (1965), she discovered the importance of the viewer becoming a "participant in the artistic experience." (29)

But, her Cloud With Its Shadow (1970) casting a little shadow made her realise that "two-dimensional art truly was a thing of the past for me." (30) From 1969 onward, she began conceptualising and proposing performance pieces, and it was in *Rhythm 10* (1973) that she first saw performance art as a way to allow the audience and herself to become one. (31) In 1975 she met Ulay, with whom she would, for 12 years, perform, with the artistic aim of leaving "ego behind, to leave masculinity and feminity behind, and meld into a third unity, which to me seemed like the highest form of art." (32) Furthermore, in 1980-81, when they both lived in the Australian outback for three months with indigenous communities, Abramović discovered the significance of time as always being present, never future nor past, instead always happening. (33) In the final three years of their relationship, the idea of a "third unity" dissipated as they drew further apart, failing "because of smallness." (34) Permeating beneath Abramović's work is the continual theme of not needing anybody and being alone without love, (35) which is insightful given that The Artist is Present will necessitate somebody.

We have highlighted three distinct influences on Abramović, enabling us to understand *The Artist is Present's* significance and underlying themes. We have highlighted: the unacknowledged influence of Christianity, the essentiality of others participating in her work, and the ideal of achieving a "third unity" through performance art. Now that we have made these three themes explicit, we can explore *The Artist is Present*.

On March 14, 2010, crowds lined up outside the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Inside the gallery space, on the ground floor, sat Marina Abramović, the public eager to partake in her present presence. *The Artist is Present* was a new work alongside her retrospective, also entitled *The Artist is Present*. The concept of the work is simple: Abramović would sit on a chair for eight hours a day, six days a week, for three months. The public could sit across from her for as long or as short a time as they chose—the only rule was no touching or speaking to her. Abramović was not only placed in the centre of the atrium, but the very architecture of MoMA located her as "the centre of the very museum itself", with it being visible from nearly all walkways and windows on every floor. (36) Abramović would perform the daily ritual of simply being with whoever was with her. She manifested a "kind of confessional" through her presence "that, at least from the phenomenological point of view, might be characterised as religious", one scholar comments. (37) This work recalled an earlier piece performed with Ulay in Japan, *Nightsea Crossing*; yet this time, it did not necessitate one *particular* person to deem it complete—Ulay—instead, the public completed the work. (38)

The present presence of Abramović contrasted with the always active landscape that is New York City represented a microcosm of love's potentialities. (39) Abramović did not create anything in the traditional sense; she simply gave of herself as a gift to dwell with. You cannot take a "piece" of *The Artist is Present* home, only its effects and memories of gazing into the other.

For Abramović, the piece's duration meant that "the performance had lasted so long that it had become life itself". (40) For the individuals sitting across from her, their life had become part of the performance. Yet, still, the gaze of onlookers in queue simultaneously represented their desire to be with Abramović. The spectacle of the many encasing the artist clarifies that the audience, too, was present.

The interchange of the public's present presence necessitated the performance to complete it. Still, it was in the individual sitting across from Abramović that signified the ever-desired idea of a "third unity". Her gaze never departed from those in front of her; as the individual returned this look, they entered a "private space" with no concern for the spectacle of the surrounding public. As the individual and Abramović melded into each other, and became a mirror for the other, they, and sometimes she, were moved to tears. She goes so far as to say she "could see and feel people's pain". (41) Throughout the three months, the sheer exuberance of love toward strangers diminished the previously held distinctions of "art" and "life"; life itself was art, and its content was unguarded love toward all. Of this unintentional love, Abramović describes how "the pain of pure love" hurt most. (43)

Through *The Artist is Present*, Abramović represents a decisive statement about how we view artworks. Defne Kirmizi says, "the exhausted and impatient way of experiencing a contemporary work was transformed into a contemplative and quiet way of seeing or more truly seeing." (44) Furthermore, Jack Richardson comments that the face-to-face encounters "were not ones of recognition, but rather a kind of ecstatic searching that produced not meaning, but a connection to the affective intensities of this encounter". (45) Richardson means that in the encounter with Abramović, you are not gazing at something to interpret intellectually; instead, you analyse your meeting with her through affection and verbosity. Richardson and Defne's observations articulate an essential connection that will enable the conversation between Paul and Abramović. Defne rightly emphasises that this performance is not seeking to be glanced at fleetingly. Richardson highlights the emergent affectivity the public ought to participate in if they are to truly 'see' *The Artist is Present*. In short, the artist asks us not to bring our questions intellectually but to simply gaze at her being with us and us being with her. To perpetually avoid this participation is to leave the intention and finality of *The Artist is Present* in a state of formlessness. Only through the public participating in the gaze does this work gain a sense of "completion".

   Abramović's performance, situated amidst the backdrop of her retrospective, implicitly suggests that whilst you may gaze at her, you also see a woman with a particular history. (46) In his recent work *How to Inhabit Time*, Christian philosopher James K.A. Smith develops the idea of individual and collective historicity, which we will expound upon later. Still, he says, "For everything created, to be is to be temporal, and to be temporal is to be indebted to a past and oriented toward a future." (47)

To be human is to be temporal, and what you "have encountered, now in the rearview mirror, primes [you] for what [you] *will* encounter." (48) And, in the context of *The Artist is Present*, Abramović primes the public to encounter her as someone with a history, not just an isolated event, not just an object to behold.

We have made three emphasises explicit from *The Artist is Present*. Abramović necessitates the other to complete the work, indebting them to her and them. The affirmative presence of Abramović's history is essential to gazing at her. Finally, the public and she somewhat converged into a "third unity", which the artist had desired since her work with Ulay. These three features will form the contour for developing the creational gaze of Galatians 5:22-25 which we will now proceed to.

Reading Galatians 5:22-25 through *The Artist is Present*

Marina Abramović surfaces three affinities between Galatians 5:22-25 and *The Artist is Present*. Firstly, Paul and Abramović's gaze is a non-exclusivist openness toward all but directed toward a singular person. Second, it is a gaze that goes against the atemporal tendencies of the contemporary Western church, revealed by *The Artist is Present* being situated in Abramović's broader retrospective. Finally, the gaze invites us to become members of the new creation by taking on its effects. Exploring the first implication is where we now turn.

Abramović's freely available gaze, as characterised by her openness to be with whoever sat across from her, (49) resonates with what Paul is getting at in Galatians 5. In verse six, Paul writes how through Christ Jesus, there is no value in identity markers whose purposes are to separate; if done so to keep the law, love fulfils that (5:6, 14). Earlier in Galatians, Paul explicitly states that all are one in Christ Jesus (3:28): there is neither Jew nor Gentile, enslaved person nor free, male nor female. This oneness in love occurs by living in step with the Spirit (5:25). Comparatively, Abramović illustrates that "living in step" is through the seeking of a face; Paul evokes the face of Christ directly before mentioning the Spirit (v.24). The artist required a mutual look, enabling *The Artist is Present* to, in this context, represent the archetypal oneness of keeping in step with the spirit Paul desired. For the community of Galatia to develop the fruit of the Spirit, characterised essentially by love, they needed to have a continual gaze upon the Spirit. Abramović becomes a contemporary representation of the Spirit's face. Through the other gazing upon her, there is the reciprocity of her contemplating them. Similarly, we can affirm that the Spirit is, too, gazing upon them.

Neither Paul nor Abramović advocates seeing an unclarified mass that loses its awareness of particularity. Rather, it is an attentive openness toward everybody. Still, it involves the giving over of the self toward a particular face. Abramović would gaze upon anybody, but it is only toward an individual.

Paul advocates looking toward the Spirit, yet in awareness that the Spirit will direct their attention toward particular individuals (6:1).

Even more so is the implication of Abramović's openness, simultaneously implying that her performance requires everybody for the artwork to gain a sense of completion. She illustrates this essentiality of inclusiveness when after two months, a man in a wheelchair arrives. Realising afterwards that she could not tell if he had legs, Abramović removed the table. For her, this removal erased the final barrier between the audience and herself. (50) Conversely, Paul argues that everybody should keep in step with the Spirit. In the conglomeration of plurality—Jew and Gentile, male and female—the distinctions of separateness disappear, intensified by love. Furthermore, Abramović helps us to see that this particular gaze does not forget history. Instead, the gaze invites the encounter with someone's history, which we will now explore.

As previously mentioned, Abramović's retrospective was the larger context for *The Artist is Present.* Her retrospective chronologically showed approximately fifty works, spanning four decades, including sound, video, and installation, alongside live re-performances by other artists of her previous works. The purpose of this retrospective is to celebrate the artist's career. More significantly, it attempts to solve how time-based and ephemeral works might be shown. (51) Thus, when the public arrives at Abramović performing *The Artist is Present*, they presumably have just viewed her previous works or will now place it mentally within her larger corpus after participating in the performance. By Abramović performing amidst the backdrop of her history, she finds much congruence with James K.A. Smith's *How to Inhabit Time* and affinity with Paul's suggestion in Galatians.

Smith emphasises that the Christian salvation narrative explicitly claims that "It's the body with scars that is resurrected", to which he draws the parallel that "it's the me with a history that is redeemed, forgiven, graced, liberated". (52) Similarly, for Abramović, it is the artist with a history you are gazing upon; for Paul, it is the community who know their history and are looking toward the Spirit. (53) Continuing, Smith notices a trend within particular strands of Western Christianity whereby grace is simply a salvific front that destroys the "I" who has a past: you are "saved" but simultaneously abstracted from your history. This ahistorical tendency leads to what he calls "nowhen Christianity". Contrastingly, he sees the human self in light of salvation, the new creation, as the amalgamation of one's past. The "I" who is redeemed is one with a history. (54)

Subsequently, what arises when viewing *The Artist is Present* is the observation that the participants who complete the performance bring their past to the artist who has her own. In this collective experience, Abramović migrates away from an individualistic object-subject relationship toward an encounter with "us", whereby the convergence of peoples' histories, at this moment, become shared. Abramović is not simply saying the isolated gaze completes the work. She conveys that the awareness of the other's history and active choice to still look toward them is its completion.

Similarly, for Paul, the Galatian community are not just a categorisation of individuals with a forgotten past. In their transition away from committing "acts of the flesh" (5:19), they become people concerned with restoring each other (6:1-2) as *they* keep in step with the Spirit. They become a "family of believers" (6:10) who live with their history in the backdrop but are seeing it through the redeemed gaze of Christ (5:24).

Finally, Abramović's performance insightfully reveals the gaze as one where we take on its effects, and in doing so, we become part of the artwork's creation. Or, we achieve Abramović's desired "third unity" that transcends the self. In Galatians, Paul correlates keeping in step with the Spirit and the fruit produced in the believer's life. Said otherwise, as the Galatian community gaze upon the Spirit, they begin to embody the Spirit's qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control. Even more so is that as they gaze, they do not just become people possessing these qualities. They become those who embody the new creation. Both in *The Artist is Present* and the new creation is the necessity of an audience. In the former, it is the reciprocal gaze between Abramović and them; in the latter, it is between the Spirit and the community. Each instance presupposes knowing that you are gazing upon the Other who is gazing upon you.

In the gaze, we begin to see that the sheer act of looking at the other allows the creational implications of Abramović to unfold in the same way as Paul articulated: the first fruits of the Spirit are love, and it is through the Spirit that in and out groups, Jew and Gentiles, us and them distinctions disintegrate. The act of gazing upon the other is participating in the new creation. Abramović embodies this, and through the audience following her lead, they enter into a silent dialogue whereby created is the silent gaze of love. It is not silence as an absence; more akin to Paul, it is the superabundance of meaning.

The creational gaze is, therefore, the sheer gratuity of *being* in the presence of the other. The very presentness of that moment begins to express itself as the new creation. For Paul, the Galatian community—and by tradition, us—gazes toward the Spirit who is heralding the new creation. This gaze is the implicit foundation for keeping in step with the Spirit, and Abramović helps us make explicit that it is creational. Without the gaze toward the Spirit there is no participation in the new creation; in *The Artist is Present* the gaze *is* the completion of the artwork.

By tending to the hermeneutical implications of Marina Abramović's *The Artist is Present* as an interlocutor for Galatians, we have surfaced three implications of gazing present in both works. It is a gaze for all but directed toward one. Both reject an ahistorical tendency. Finally, we participate in the new creation by taking on the gaze's effects. Abramović subtly became a metaphor for the face of the Spirit. Her present presence permeates the space whereby the public seeks to encounter her, to be known—whether to themselves, friends, family, or social media—as someone who has gazed upon Abramović, who is gazing back at them.

And, for Paul, the present presence of the Spirit is the one with whom he directs the community to gaze upon and keep in step with. They do not forget their past by gazing toward the Spirit, highlighted in Abramović's retrospective. Taking upon its effects results in the redemption of their history. Its fruit is the Spirit's qualities, which is itself the new creation, one with an overabundance of meaning that transcends distinctions of separateness. To gaze upon the Spirit is to participate in the new creation. To gaze, therefore, is to create.

Endnotes

1. Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art, and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 123–34.

2. Viladesau, 222.

3. S.J. Castro argues that Abramović becomes representative of a Priestess figure in this work in "The Transcendence of Transgression," *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research* 16, no. 3 (2018): 238, https://doi.org/10.1386/tear.16.3.237_1.

4. For example: Lydia Brawner, "The Word Made Flesh: Hokum Aesthetics" (Ph.D., New York, New York University, 2016); Castro, "The Transcendence of Transgression."

5. For example, the "Visual Commentary on Scripture," https://thevcs.org/.

6. It is most convincing to date it between 48-49 AD, see, Moo, 18; David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians* (US: Eerdmans, 2018), 101. Contra, Craig S. Keener, *Galatians*, NCBC (Cambridge: CUP, 2018), 7.

7. Paraphrase of Dunn's quote in Moo, *Galatians*, 20.

8. Keener, *Romans*, 15.

9. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 129.

10. Moo, *Galatians*, 30–31.

11. G.K. Beale argues "that Gal 5:22-25 is a highly charged eschatological passage about Isaiah's promised new creation, which is brought about through the agency of the Spirit. This understanding appears to reveal a link to Gal 6:14-16." G.K. Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Paul's Reference to 'the Fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15, no. 1 (2005): 1–38, quote in 23; Weima sees 6:15 and the new creation as "paramount" for "understanding Paul's theology in Galatians." Jeffrey A.D. Weima, "Gal 6:11-18: A Hermeneutical Key to the Galatian Letter," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28, no. 1 (1993): 90–107, quote in 102.

12. Keener notes that the majority of the virtues listed are communal in, Craig S. Keener, "Galatians 5:13-6:10," in *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 478; Similarly,

Ukwuegbu sees Paul's development here as an attempt to articulate the group's normative behaviour and identity in contrast to competing groups, and, subsequently, reference for how they interpret the world, see: Bernard O. Ukwuegbu, "Paraenesis, Identity-Defining Norms, or Both? Galatians 5:13-6:10 in the Light of Social Identity Theory," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2008): 538–59.

13. Ukwuegbu, "Paraenesis, Identity-Defining Norms, or Both? Galatians 5:13-6:10 in the Light of Social Identity Theory," 551–52.

14. Raymond F. Collins emphasises the participatory nature of "belonging to Christ" in *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 95–96.

15. Moo, *Galatians*, 371.

16. Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, REC (NJ: P & R, 2005), 239.

17. Ryken, 239; Moo, *Galatians*, 371.

18. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul*, 107.

19. Ryken, *Galatians*, 239-240.

20. Moo, *Galatians*, 372.

21. Keener, *Romans*, 264.

22. I presuppose here that to "keep in step" with someone, you need to look at where their step is.

23. There is a deep familial connection to the Serbian Orthodox Church for Abramović, with her grandfather's brother being the Patriach of the Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia, Marina Abramović and James Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 2016), 6 and 28.

24. For an extended discussion on the state of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Yugoslavia at this time see, Neven Vukic, "The Church in a Communist State: Justin Popovic (1894–1979) and the Struggle for Orthodoxy in Serbia/Yugoslavia," *A Journal of Church and State* 63, no. 2 (2021): 278–99.

25. Although, it is uncertain if Abramović would have had the Eucharist herself, it is almost certain she would have seen others. If the insight by Miriam Cosic in the Financial Review is true, saying, "Her grandmother loathed communism and had baby Marina secretly baptised", then it is likely she would have participated in the Eucharist also; Miriam Cosic, "Performance Artist Marina Abramovic at the Cutting Edge," *Australian Financial Review*, March 26, 2015, https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/performance-artist-marina-abramovic-at-the-cutting-edge-20150218-13hwi1.

26. Introvigne picks up on this lack of connection in his review of Abramović's memoir, too: Massimo Introvigne, "Review: Walk Through Walls: A Memoir by Marina Abramović," *Nova Religio* 21, no. 4 (2018): 107. Brawner notes others, such as Alan Read, who have made this connection before, too: Brawner, "The Word Made Flesh," 98.

27. Abramović and Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls*, 13.

28. Abramović and Kaplan, 15 and 29; In addition to Abramović's clear Christian influence via Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Chanda Laine Carey has important research into the transcultural and non-Western influences on Abramović, see: Chanda Laine Carey, "Embodying the Sacred: Marina Abramović, Transcultural Aesthetics, and the Global Geography of Art" (Ph.D., San Diego, UC San Diego, 2016).

29. Abramović and Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls*, 38.

30. Abramović and Kaplan, 48.

31. Abramović and Kaplan, 60.

32. Abramović and Kaplan, 109.

33. Abramović and Kaplan, 128.

34. Abramović and Kaplan, 170.

35. Abramović and Kaplan, 118.

36. Brawner, "The Word Made Flesh," 83.

37. Castro, "The Transcendence of Transgression," 238.

38. Abramović and Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls*, 300.

39. Similarly, Müller connects the sheltered environment of the Museum, its subsequent grant of individual autonomy to choose being visible or invisible, and its resultant implication of the experience allowing vulnerability. Oliver Müller, "Being Seen: An Exploration of a Core Phenomenon of Human Existence and Its Normative Dimensions," *Springer* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 378.

40. Abramović and Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls*, 317.

41. Abramović and Kaplan, 309.

42. "The sheer quantity of love, the unconditional love of total strangers, was the most incredible feeling I've ever had… I'd always thought of art as something that was expressed through certain tools… But this performance went beyond performance. This was life… I began to feel more and more strongly that art must be life—it must belong to everybody"; Abramović and Kaplan, 319.

43. Abramović and Kaplan, 319.

44. Defne Kirmizi, "Aesthetic Experience in Performance Art: Marina Abramović the Artist Is Present" (Master's Thesis, Ankara, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University, 2013), 101.

45. Jack Richardson, "Against Interpretation: Searching Marina Abramović's Face," *Studies in Art Education* 61, no. 3 (2020): 216.

46. Whilst the retrospective is an overt example of this, Müller emphasises the implicit correlative in Abramović's age saying, "Abramovic—who, incidentally is already 70 years old—displayed herself and her body showing a vulnerability that surpasses any depiction of the bare and the abused." Müller, "Being Seen," 378. Comparatively, Brawner observes Abramović as being present in the atrium performance, and upstairs "through the videos, photographs, and re-performances", Brawner, "The Word Made Flesh," 91.

47. James K A Smith, *How to Inhabit Time: Understanding the Past, Facing the Future, Living Faithfully Now* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 27.

48. Smith, 29. Italics original.

49. Although beyond the scope of this paper and not detrimental to our thesis, is the consideration of class impact and the limits of participation for particular socioeconomic demographics. In particular is the insight that the highest odds for participation in Arts events were those "in the highest income group", for an exploration of this see: Jessica K. Bone et al., "Who Engages in the Arts in the United States? A Comparison of Several Types of Engagement Using Data from The General Social Survey.," *BMC Public Health* 21, no. 1 (2021): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11263-0.

50. Abramović and Kaplan, *Walk Through Walls*, 316.

51. Kirmizi illustrates Abramović's decade-long interest in this, Kirmizi, "Aesthetic Experience in Performance Art," 64.

52. Smith, *How to Inhabit Time*, 11.

53. To "crucify the flesh" necessitates an understanding of what one's flesh has done in history (Galatians 5:24).

54. To "crucify the flesh" necessitates an understanding of what one's flesh has done in history (Galatians 5:24).

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Creation Stories and Divine Designing are Still Cool

Wei Luo

In the 21st century, scientific progress has brought scientism, a worldview that places great value on scientific knowledge, to the forefront of popular culture. Two scientific theories in particular, Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang Cosmology, are often used to challenge the theistic worldview of the Abrahamic traditions. However, this does not mean that teleological and cosmological arguments are outdated or invalid. Instead, these scientific theories can be seen as complementary to theistic belief, offering a broader understanding of the universe. This paper explores the possibility of intelligent design reconciling Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang Cosmology with theistic belief. In particular, I will examine how intelligent design theory can complement science and religion, allowing theists to maintain their belief in God's existence while accepting scientific explanations for the origins of life.

Intelligent Design and its History

There are various forms of creationism within the Christian tradition, many of which people are unaware of. (1) One of these forms is the idea of intelligent design, which is not accepted by all Christians. (2) Intelligent design suggests that the complexity and functionality of nature are the work of an intelligent designer and that nature reflects God's design, without necessarily explaining how design arose in nature. (3) While the idea of intelligent design is widely discussed within Abrahamic theology circles, it is, in fact, a universal theological concept that many cultures throughout history have believed in. For instance, the ancient Greeks believed in a god named Protogonus, who was the seed of creation and sparked the creation of the world and all living things. (4) On the other hand, the ancient Egyptians believed in a creator god named Atum. (5) In these early religious traditions, intelligent design was closely tied to mythology and was used to explain the universe's origins.

Christian theologians developed more sophisticated arguments for intelligent design during the medieval period. For instance, theologian Thomas Aquinas argued that the natural world's complexity was evidence of God's existence and creative power. (6) He also posited that the universe had a purpose, and everything in it was created with a specific end in mind. (7)

After Aquinas, an increasing number of Christian believers began to apply reason informed by the scientific method to theological matters, and some prominent figures in science were among them. English mathematician Sir Isaac Newton and German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz notably disagreed on the nature of the world in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. (8) Newton saw nature as an unstable mechanism that required multiple divine interventions after the start of creation to keep it working properly. (9) Meanwhile, Leibniz believed that the world was created perfectly and required no further intervention from God. (10) This debate highlighted the importance of the concept of intelligent design, which argues that the complexity of the universe and its living organisms cannot be explained solely by natural selection and random mutations. This debate over the nature of the world and the role of divine intervention was a significant moment in the history of intelligent design in theological practice. It highlighted the tension between the scientific study of the natural world and theological beliefs about the existence and actions of a creator God.

Moving to 1961, Robert H. Dicke put forth the idea that certain fundamental forces in physics, including gravity and electromagnetism, must be precisely calibrated to allow for the existence of life in the universe in his journal on Nature Dirac's Cosmology and Mach's Principle. (11) Dicke's argument suggested that if these forces were even slightly different, the universe would not be able to support life in any form. This notion of fine-tuning led some philosophers and religious thinkers to assert that the complex design of the universe could not be explained by chance or natural selection alone and that intelligent design was a more compelling explanation for the apparent purpose and order in the cosmos. The argument for intelligent design posits that the intricate interplay of forces and constants required to sustain life could only be the result of a deliberate and intelligent creator rather than a series of random events. (12) While this theory has been the subject of much debate and controversy within the scientific community, it continues to be a topic of interest and discussion for those seeking to understand the universe's origins and purpose.

Today, the concept of intelligent design remains controversial, with many scientists and philosophers arguing that it is not a scientifically valid theory. Nevertheless, it continues to be a topic of interest for many religious thinkers who see it as a way to reconcile their faith with scientific knowledge.

Have the Teleological and Cosmological Arguments Become Historical Curiosities?

Charles Darwin is primarily known for his work in evolutionary biology. His theory of evolution by natural selection has significantly impacted how many people understand the natural world, including their views on religion and the role of divine action.

TIn fact, many scientists and religious thinkers continue to discuss and debate the relationship between science and religion, including the possibility of divine action within the context of evolutionary theory

   The arguments put forth by Darwin in his autobiography represent one perspective on the relationship between science and religion. While he ultimately rejected Christianity as a divine revelation, his arguments do not necessarily rule out the possibility of personal divine action or the existence of God. In the book Autobiography of Charles Darwin, Darwin presents three early cosmological arguments which showcase how mainstem modern scientists view the idea of divine action and Christianity. The first one is that "the more we know of the fixed laws of nature, the more incredible miracles become." (13) It is a statement of personal interventionism that says science proves there are no miracles. The second concerns his understanding of ancient religious people, "that the men at that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us." (14) It suggests that foolish and uneducated individuals believe in miracles due to their lack of knowledge.

he third one relates to the inaccuracy of the Christian holy texts; Darwin argues "that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events, that they differ in many important details, far too important it seems to me, to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitnesses." (15) This argues that the contradictions can be viewed as evidence of a lack of authenticity. Darwin himself states that by reflecting on these three arguments, he came to "disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation." (16)

Looking at Darwin's first argument, it is reasonable to believe that if there are no cosmological interventions in origins and operations, then there are no personal interventions in the lives of people. Although this is not necessarily true, it is still possible to reject cosmological interventions while accepting personal divine action for religious people, such as dramatic personal interventionism or subtle personal providentialism. (17) Darwin holds the idea that there is only one kind of divine action, so to believe that cosmological divine action and personal divine action conflict with one another. Thus, there is still room for Darwinists to subscribe to the theistic hypothesis. It appears that Darwin rejects the Bible, especially the false history of the world, such as the Genesis 1-3 creation story, but he does not necessarily leave no room for God. For example, within the theology community, there is an idea called the non-concordist approach, which argues that science improves biblical interpretation. This approach looks at the Bible as an ancient account of actual divine actions written by ancient people within the limitations of their time. In this case, 21st-century people who are educated by 21st-century science will find statements about nature in the Bible odd and even delusional. However, there is one possibility that they were explaining and writing things that happened to them in life with the conditions of their ancient phenomenological perspective.

The idea that teleological and cosmological arguments are just failed science showcases a sense of dualism of 21st-century people between absolute accuracy and absolute inaccuracy. Perhaps we must understand that both ancient and modern histories include metaphysical interpretations in history studies, for all-knowing perfect humans did not produce them. For example, the Mesopotamians included flood stories drawn from their oral traditions, and Hebrews and Greek people also passed down this story. (18) However, all three communities interpreted this event through their own theological system. Historians often look at it as solid proof that the flood historically happened since three different traditions all mentioned it, and the contradictions can be the evidence of authenticity. If this principle also applies to the different details of the one event in biblical writings, perhaps it says that the Bible contains a level of truth and ancient phenomenological perspectives of its authors.

While some may see science and religion as incompatible, the concept of intelligent design suggests that they can work together in harmony to explain the world around us. One example of this is the relationship between Darwinian evolutionary theory and intelligent design. While some may view evolution as a purely naturalistic process, others see it as evidence of intelligent design. They argue that the intricate complexity of life on Earth could not have arisen solely through natural selection and random mutations. Instead, they believe that God guided the process of evolution to create the diverse array of life we see today.

How a Theistic Hypothesis Might Help us Understand the Universe

In Thomas Aquinas' famous five ways argument, the discussion of cosmology appears to involve the study of the origins and structure of the universe. All five ways reflect the conditions that "must have been in place in order for the universe, or some observed feature of the universe, to come about." If the appropriate way to consider God's existence is "to think of it as a hypothesis posited to explain observational data," then for theists, "a hypothesis provides the best explanation for agreed-upon facts." As Le Poidevin argues, "a way of life-based on a metaphysical conception of the world" leads to the conclusion that the factual components in religious doctrines are "essentially explanatory hypotheses." In a way, whenever an individual makes claims about their reality, that individual is making a claim through their own metaphysical conception. Therefore, for the theist, there is a chance that atheists are looking at nature through their metaphysical lens, which makes them believe that design is an illusion. The same case applies to atheists; for them, Christians could be viewing nature through a metaphysical lens that makes them believe divine design is real.

As Kant argues, "the human mind will ever give up metaphysical research is as little to be expected as that we, to avoid inhaling impure air, should prefer to give up breathing altogether. There will, therefore, always be metaphysics in the world." In a way, everyone is the product of their metaphysics, including those who accept scientism and those who accept theology. People who accept scientism must recognize that they hold a metaphysical position that their view is purely "scientific." Thus, if Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang Cosmology provide a level of understanding of the universe through the scientism metaphysic, the theistic metaphysic offers something similar.

Moreover, Kant also argues that "the concept of a supreme being is in many respects a very useful idea; but just because it is a mere idea, it is altogether incapable, by itself alone, of enlarging our knowledge in regards to what exists." I argue that Kant is right that the concept of a supreme being is useful. However, he is wrong that it cannot enlarge our knowledge regarding what exists, especially when it comes to understanding the universe.

For example, the subscriber of intelligent design theory draws correlations between two different human experiences because of the concept of a supreme being. The first experience is the experiential one, in which most people (both historical and modern) sense the world is designed. The second experience is the scientific experience that there seems to be some fine-tuning in the natural world, and species evolve and adjust themselves through natural evolution. So, how is the concept of a supreme not enlarging our knowledge regarding what exists?

Materialist Belief and Scientism are not Equivalent to Scientific Truth

Scientism often tries to disguise itself as "science" or as the "scientific perspective," but it is actually a metaphysical ideology that assumes a lack of purpose in the universe and then attempts to legitimize itself by using scientific language and authority. While science strives for objectivity, it is essential to recognize that it is influenced by the personal backgrounds and beliefs of individual scientists and their assumptions about the nature of reality, including the supernatural. Therefore, science cannot be considered purely objective, as it is born out of metaphysical perspectives.

Even the greatest scientists approach their work with their own metaphysical beliefs in tow. For example, Sir Isaac Newton was a remarkable scientist deeply interested in theology. Even as he studied celestial systems, he believed he was exploring the workings of the divine. Scientists use the tools of science to understand better the existence they seek to explore, but their personal views and beliefs inevitably influence their work.

The dysteleological evolution theory argues that our universe and beings evolved without any ultimate plan or purpose. This means that natural processes are run by blind chance, including the Big Bang and all the evolution traits people found in beings. In contrast to this, the evolutionary creation theory holds by many modern Christians that the Bible reveals some spiritual truths that happened to be written by ancient people with their ancient phenomenological perspectives. It is the idea that theologians often refer to as the Scripture being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; it aimed to reveal spiritual truths but no modern scientific facts. (19) Many scientists argue that the laws and initial conditions of the Big Bang were so finely tuned that the Big Bang happened out of a chance that is so small that it is almost impossible to happen by chance. Why could there not be a chance that there was a mover or designer of the Big Bang?

John F. Haught is one philosopher who sees the problematic nature of dualism when it comes to evolutionary thinkers' fundamentalist belief in scientism. He states that "the fantasies of categorical finality among evolutionary thinkers exhibit a dogmatism as rigid as that of any creationist." (20) In a way, science and religion are being separated and placed in two non-overlapping territories, while this compartmentalization itself reveals a not necessarily always accurate type of metaphysical materialism. There is no way that we can know for a fact that evolution is meaningless outside a materialist context, and we also do not have concrete so-called scientific evidence to find out about that. The argument itself requires a metaphysical lens, so they are not equivalent to scientific truth by any means. In John Haught's Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation, he points out the nature of the materialist belief system and scientism. He states that "a materialist belief system allies itself with science in such a way as to diminish the plausibility of any non-materialist, religious interpretation of the cosmos." (21) If we see the Darwinian evolutionary theory as a purely scientific theory, then "that should not be taken hostage neither by theism nor by materialism." (22) Thus, while the Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang Cosmology stand, there should still be room for teleological and cosmological arguments, such as intelligent design theory.

   Materialist belief systems and scientism are problematic when it comes to evolutionary thinking, as they limit the plausibility of non-materialist religious interpretations of the cosmos. While scientific theories like Darwinian evolution and Big Bang Cosmology should not be taken hostage by either theism or materialism, there should still be room for teleological and cosmological arguments like intelligent design theory. I want to remind people of our time that while science strives for objectivity, it is important to recognize that personal beliefs and assumptions influence it and that scientific truth is not equivalent to metaphysical ideologies like materialism and scientism. Theories like Darwinian evolution and Big Bang Cosmology should be evaluated based on empirical evidence, while philosophical and religious interpretations of the cosmos should be considered within a different framework.

Intelligent Design Theory: A Complementary Perspective on the Origins of Life

Philosophers like Antony Flew argue that the complexity of DNA suggests the involvement of intelligence in the creation of life. In his book There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind, he wrote that "Biologists' investigation of DNA has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved." (23) While intelligent design theory may not provide concrete evidence for the role of a divine being in the Big Bang or in the evolutionary blueprint for life, it is still possible for intelligent design theory to coexist with scientific theories like Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang cosmology. In this sense, intelligent design theory can be a complementary relationship between science and religion, allowing theists to maintain their belief in God's existence while also accepting scientific explanations for the origins of life.

Conclusion

Rather than seeing science and religion as incompatible, viewing them as complementary ways of understanding the world is possible, each offering unique insights and perspectives. While some may argue that the concept of a supreme being is merely an idea and cannot increase our knowledge about what exists, the correlation drawn between the experiential and scientific experiences of the world through the concept of a supreme being is an example of how it can expand our understanding of the universe. As long as people hold metaphysical beliefs about the world, whether they are scientific or theological, they are engaging in a form of metaphysical research. Materialist belief systems and scientism often try to assert themselves as the ultimate truth, but they are just one lens through which to view the world. Scientific truth is not equivalent to metaphysical ideologies, and we must acknowledge the influence of personal beliefs and assumptions in scientific research.

As scientism gains popularity through scientific advancements like Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang cosmology, it is important to recognize the potential pitfalls of the dualism between science and faith. Intelligent design theory offers a plausible solution for reconciling the scientific and theistic perspectives, acknowledging that there may be a reasonable chance for Darwinian evolutionary theory and Big Bang cosmology to be part of a creator God's plan. While not universally accepted as valid, this idea is a significant step towards bridging the gap between science and religion and encouraging constructive dialogue between the two. Ultimately, we may uncover a more comprehensive understanding of our creation story by exploring the intersection of science and faith.

Endnotes

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2. Ibid., 285.

3. Ibid., 285.

4. Thomas Taylor, Thomas Taylor, *The Platonist: Selected Writings*, eds., Kathleen Raine & George Mills Harper, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), (p.215).

5. Hisham el-Leithy, 'Iconography and Function of Stelae and Coffins in Dynasties 25–26,' in *Ancient Egyptian Coffins: Craft Traditions and Functionality*, (Peeters Publishers, 2018), pp. 61-76, (p.67).

6. John F.X. Knasas, 'Aquinas' Ascription of Creation to Aristotle', in *Angelicum*, 73, (1996), pp. 487–505, (p.487-488).

7. ibid.

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11. R. H. Dickie, 'Dirac's Cosmology and Mach's Principle,' in *Nature* 192, no. 4801 (1961): pp. 440-441, (p.441).

12. Scott, '*Creationism', How Evolution Shapes Our Lives,* pp.284-285.

13. Charles Darwin and Francis Darwin, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin: With Two Appendices, Comprising a Chapter of Reminiscences and a Statement of Charles Darwin's Religious Views by His Son, Sir Francis Darwin* (London: Watts & Co., 2003), (p.84).

14. ibid.

15. ibid.

16. ibid.

17. Providentialism within Christianity refers to the belief that God governs all events on Earth, including both natural phenomena and human actions. This view holds that God has a plan for humanity and actively intervenes in the world to ensure that His plan is fulfilled. Proponents of providentialism believe that nothing happens by chance and that everything is part of God's larger plan for humanity.

18. Robert Drews, 'Sargon, Cyrus and Mesopotamian Folk History', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* 33, (1974), pp.387–93, (p.387).

19. Robert Drews, 'Sargon, Cyrus and Mesopotamian Folk History', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 33, (1974), pp.387–93, (p.387).

20. John F Haught, 'Darwin, Design, and Divine Providence', in *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA*, eds., William A. Dembski & Michael Ruse, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 229–45, (p.230).

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22. Haught, 'Divine Providence', *Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA,* p.231.

23. Antony Flew, Rory Abraham Varghese, 'How Did Life Go Live?', in *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, (New York: Harper One, 2007), pp.124-132, (p.123).

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The Creation of Minfulness: The Use of Buddhist Thought in The West

Jake Perkin

In recent decades, there has been a fascinating trend of new religious movements in the Western world which has bucked the general trend of secularisation that many scholars would assume would continue. While by many metrics, religiosity in the Western world has been in a sharp decline, at the same time there has been an emergence of new forms of spirituality, and an existential debate has emerged questioning if these parallel trends are beneficial for broader society. (1) It makes sense that a debate around these topics would get heated. It can be easy to forget while reading clinical and dry academic texts that religion is more than just words on a page. For billions of people over thousands of years, religion has provided a sense of morality, a tightly bonded community, and a framework for understanding the seemingly random events that happen in everyone's life.

Despite the best efforts of nonreligious thinkers and academics, a viable alternative to religion to fill these gaps in people's lives has not been widely accepted into popular culture yet. (2) While it's impossible to decisively prove causation between the decline of religion in the West and an increase in loneliness and mental health issues, there appears to be a causal relationship that has led many religious activists to begin advocating for the need for a religious revival. However, this is a complex sociological issue that has no obvious solutions. As a result of the increase in mental health issues and the decline of religion, many businesses and governments have begun seeking quick methods to make their employees and citizens feel better and fill that spiritual void. (3) The concept of mindfulness has become a popular panacea for addressing everything from increasing the productivity of workers to addressing the wide-scale mental health crisis. This new form of spirituality has been created out of a Western interpretation of Buddhist meditation practices. In many ways, the field of mindfulness has grown to become just as diverse as the religion of Buddhism, and it has begun to branch off. Some forms of mindfulness have retained the originally spiritual aspects of mindfulness seen in Buddhism, with some Christians, Jews, and yoga practitioners now combining mindfulness with their old belief systems. (4) (5) (6

However, the type of mindfulness that has gained the most attention — and criticism — is corporate mindfulness, which has been nicknamed "McMindfulness" by its critics and works to almost entirely secularise Buddhist philosophy. (7) There is a contentious and ongoing debate amongst scholars about whether Western mindfulness should be considered part of the Buddhist tradition, or something new created in the Western world, and inspired by Buddhist traditions. While there is undeniable evidence of the ideological roots of Western mindfulness still present today, as a whole Buddhism and mindfulness have both become so diversified and separated as to massively complicate the question. Because of the rapid growth and diversity of mindfulness, a compelling case can be made that mindfulness is a new creation, separate from the old traditions of Buddhism, which must be examined on its own to gain a better understanding of how it impacts the world.

Before a discussion about mindfulness can properly begin, it is important to understand the context behind mindfulness and how it was created. In many ways, mindfulness is an incredibly new concept. Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1982), the Buddhist monk that many of the concepts that form mindfulness originate from, died only 41 years ago. Sayadaw came from a Burmese lineage, being taught by Ledi Sayadaw (1846/7-1923) and Mingun Sayadaw (1870-1955) during his training. (8) Sayadaw began developing new ideas on meditation in the mid-20th century, mainly focusing on the present moment in a lucid awareness of oneself. He used the word sati, translated to mindfulness in English, to describe this state.

   His methods were spread by his disciples and gained some popularity amongst lay people in Buddhist countries because they did not involve any higher-level forms of concentration or meditation, which has traditionally separated the monks from the lay people in Buddhist communities. (9) These ideas were later transmitted to the West through Massachusetts-based psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn, who had an experience with Buddhism in a temple while visiting Asia in 1979. (10) When he returned to the United States, he attempted to apply these methods he had seen during his travels to his American patients and published a book based on his success. Already the tenuous link between mainstream Buddhism and the early years of mindfulness can be observed. Kabat-Zinn only studied Buddhism in Asia for a short period, meaning he was only able to gain partial knowledge of a specific sect of Buddhism. Many of Kabat-Zinn's later writings demonstrate influences of Zen Buddhism and the neo-vipassanā movement which was occurring within Theravada Buddhism at that time, showing a mixing of many movements that were occurring in Buddhism at the time, some of which were opposed to each other. (11)

Professor Husgafvel from the University of Helsinki also found some influences from Mahāyāna Buddhism, specifically the Tibetan Dzogchen practices, present in mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) courses that Kabat-Zinn helped create: however, these ideas are absent from mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and other Western mindfulness courses, further complicating the matter and making it harder to definitively link mindfulness to any specific Buddhist tradition. (12) As a result, most of the ideas Kabat-Zinn brought back to the US were relatively new within the Buddhist tradition and heavily criticised by more traditional Buddhist practitioners from the broader Buddhist world. (13) The influences that Zen Buddhism, the neo-vipassanā movement and Tibetan Dzogchen teachings had on Kabat-Zinn's work can still be widely seen across Western mindfulness, even if some segments of the mindfulness movement have attempted to secularise. (14) (15) This demonstrates one of the major issues with evaluating how closely related Western mindfulness is currently with Buddhism since both have significant internal disagreements. The conflict within mindfulness to balance Buddhist influences with a Westernised approach can be seen in Kabat-Zinn's original work with MBSR. MBSR is more Buddhist-oriented than some of the other forms of mindfulness, such as MBCT; however, even Kabat-Zinn attempts to characterise the Buddhist ideas he promotes as being universally applicable, rather than proselytising a new religion. (16) To make Buddhism universally applicable, Kabat-Zinn put it through a process of demythologising that is indicative of the wider trends in Buddhist modernism. While the Buddhist roots of Western mindfulness are well-documented, little traditional widely accepted Buddhist doctrine was present in the actual teachings, and the actual practice has been tailored to fit a Western audience in a process that has been criticised by both Asian Buddhist and Western thinkers. Already, a disconnect between mindfulness and Buddhism can be seen at the very inception of mindfulness, although a complete separation has not occurred yet.

Some researchers have tried to argue that mindfulness is still part of Buddhism, and has not branched off into an entirely new practice. As evidence, they point to an interesting underlying connection that still influences mindfulness today. Bhikkhu Anālayo, a Buddhist monk from Germany, attempts to prove that Western mindfulness and Buddhist meditation actually had very similar goals. He cites the Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta (Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness) and the Ānāpānasati-sutta (Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing) as examples of ancient Buddhist texts which present many ideas parallel to the mindfulness movement and even claims to find similar ideas in the Indian text Ṛgveda which predates Buddhism. (17) Not only are the methods used by the mindfulness movement present in writing but there is some evidence to suggest the practices were used similarly.

Anālayo specifically cites the story of King Pasenadi found in the Pāli text, the Saṃyutta-nikāya, which is then repeated in two Chinese translations of the Saṃyukta-āgama. (18) The texts all describe how King Pasenadi went to the Buddha asking for help controlling his eating habits, with the Buddha prescribing a type of meditation to help him.

   Anālayo uses this story to counter the criticism of Western mindfulness that it has removed the original end goal of enlightenment from Buddhist practices since the king in the story has indulged in many pleasures and was not on the path to enlightenment. This instruction of the Buddha was not meant to guide him towards enlightenment, but rather to use meditation to solve a specific problem he was having, similar to what modern mindfulness seminars aim to do in the modern world. (19) Bhikkhu Anālayo also views the relationship between Buddhism and politics differently than the critiques of Western mindfulness. While he recognises the legitimacy of the critique that Western mindfulness promotes complacency within a neoliberal capitalist system that causes suffering, Bhikkhu Anālayo does not see this as something Buddhism should be expected to help solve. He rejects the idea that it is at odds with Buddhist thinking to continue to live in the modern world, and to back this idea up, Anālayo turns to the teachings of the Buddha. He admits the Buddha describes systemic problems and suffering in many different stories as morally bad, but notes that the Buddha does not encourage his disciple to try and change these systems. Instead, the Buddha tells his disciples to find refuge within themselves and the Dharma through a process of mindfulness. (20) If Buddhism does not advocate for political action to solve systemic suffering, then many of the critiques that revolve around modern mindfulness being complacent with neoliberal capitalism lose their power. Other researchers have pushed back against the criticism that Western mindfulness does not have any ethical basis, arguing mindfulness programs do teach Buddhist ethics less directly. While few mindfulness programmes will boldly state an ethical position, programmes more closely related to Buddhism, like MBSR, will still have undertones of Buddhist values. (21)

   This practice is controversial inside the mindfulness community, and some have even suggested it would be better if these programmes did not try to teach Buddhist ethics because of problems with teacher quality and the difficulties of trying to communicate ethical principles developed in a context foreign to most Western audiences. (22) Purser has been particularly vocal on this front, warning that viewing Buddhist ethics through a Western lens could eliminate the communal and societal implications it has, thus nullifying the point of teaching Buddhist values in these programmes. (23) Overall, the complexities inside both schools of thought make it challenging to definitively determine how closely linked Buddhism and mindfulness are.

While it is hard to conclusively prove that mindfulness is no longer related to Buddhism, the practice of mindfulness has shifted away from traditional Buddhist teachings and now actively contradicts Buddhism in multiple ways. Some mindfulness courses highlight their Buddhist connections in an attempt to appeal to people in the West seeking Buddhist knowledge, but most have tried to distance themselves from their Buddhist roots. Purser and Loy identified two main reasons for the push away from Buddhism within the mindfulness movement. First, mindfulness seminars are also a business, and thus see disconnecting themselves from Buddhism as a useful marketing tool to appeal to a broader audience. (24) Mindfulness seminars have found particular traction in modern technology companies which are sceptical of the spiritual and feminine association that Buddhism and meditation have (Smallen 2019: 145). Therefore, removing the connections to Buddhism and creating an entirely new system of thought has become a strategy to help market these seminars to a secular audience. The second reason mindfulness has removed itself from Buddhism is because of the incompatibility of Buddhist ideas with Western capitalism. Purser and Loy argue the modern corporate structure institutionalised "the three unwholesome motivations that Buddhism highlights—greed, ill will, and delusion." (25) Thus, Buddhism and mindfulness are placed in conflict since the mindfulness movement has been incorporated into the capitalist system. Professor João Simão from the Universidade Aberta expands on this idea by laying out three Buddhist doctrines, anatta (soullessness), kama tanha (sensory pleasures) and kamma (karma), which are incompatible with modern capitalism and not found in mindfulness teachings. (26) The Buddhist theory of anatta (soullessness) states that humans are without a "self" or a "soul". While this concept can be hard to grasp, the practical application of this philosophy leads to a dissolution of private property, since private property cannot exist without an individual that has ownership. Since the idea of anatta destroyed the concept of the individual and thus private property, it is incompatible with capitalism. (27) Buddhism also fights against kama tanha (sensory pleasures) and desire, which is problematic for mindfulness seminars since modern capitalist economies are built on the desire of people to consume objects for sensory pleasure. (28) One of the biggest differences between Buddhism and mindfulness is that Buddhism asks its followers to renounce worldly pleasures in favour of a spiritual awakening.

Mindfulness teachers in the Western capitalist world rarely ask their followers to give up anything worldly, thus failing to fundamentally change the consumerist societies they are being presented in. Therefore, mindfulness can be seen as an attempt to gain the benefits of a Buddhist spiritual awakening without the abstention from worldly pleasures demanded by Buddhist teachings. (29) Finally, the concept of kamma (karma) is opposed to capitalism's focus on innovation and free enterprise.

Simão claims kamma means no person is born truly free, as they are tied to the laws of kamma, and in Buddhism, recognising this fact is a key step in attaining true freedom from the cycle of rebirth. (30) Thus, the capitalist emphasis on innovation is just another example of the "turning of the wheel" present in Buddhist thought. Therefore, by living in a capitalist system, a Buddhist practitioner merely contributes to the destruction of the Dharma or the teachings of the Buddha. Simão, Purser and Loy see Western mindfulness as an attempt to strip Buddhist doctrines and ethics from the meditation practices for therapeutic results. This is because the goal of mindfulness, particularly in a corporate setting, is to help the individual block out negative emotions in order to better perform for the corporation. An example of this can be seen in the National Football League (NFL), which uses mindfulness seminars to help its players aggressively disconnect from their feelings to achieve peak athletic performance, something that is contrary to Buddhist ideals on so many levels. (31) A different approach to proving the incompatibility of Buddhism and capitalism can be taken using the Maussian idea of the gift. Chipamong Chowdhury, a Buddhist monk and researcher at the University of Toronto, noted that the Maussian idea of gift exchange could be applied to spiritual rituals important in Buddhist beliefs, especially those surrounding death. Chowdhury cites the process by which family members of the dead share food and other offerings with a monk in exchange for the monks' knowledge and blessings, which is in turn shared with the dead relative through the family. (32) This complex web of giving, receiving and reciprocating fits in nicely with Mauss' gift exchange. (33)

While interpretations of Mauss' gift exchange exceed the scope of this paper, many researchers have noted the incompatibility of the concept of a gift with modern capitalism. (34) Combine all this, and a compelling case can be made that mindfulness has completely separated itself from Buddhism to fit in better with the neoliberal capitalist system found in the West.

While the evidence to show the split between mindfulness and Buddhism is certainly convincing, the focus on comparing Buddhism and mindfulness has led scholars to forget that mindfulness has been a positive force, even if it is separated from Buddhism. Scholars like Simão, Purser and Loy make the bold claim that mindfulness can be seen as an extension of colonialist and neoliberal thought, as a continuation of orientalism, and as another example of Western thinkers taking credit for the work of colonised peoples. (35) (36) This framing places the creation of mindfulness as an inherently bad thing, however, it is also undeniable that mindfulness practices have been beneficial to a large, if unknown, number of people. After all, according to a meta-study that combined 39 unique studies totalling up to 1,140 participants, mindfulness-based therapy helped reduce anxiety and mood symptoms in mentally healthy participants and was nearly twice as effective in mentally unwell participants. (37)

Part of the reason that these ideas have spread so widely is that they help people. While there is certainly a debate around whether or not society as a whole should be trying to make neoliberal capitalism work at all, it is undeniable that it has made some people happier with their own lives during this period when so much seems to be going wrong in the world, even if the root cause of those issues is neoliberal capitalism.

Ultimately, one of the most important developments to come out of the creation of mindfulness is the fascinating relationship that it has with the modern capitalist system and the foundation of colonialism upon which it was built. Modern capitalism has undeniably been beneficial to the West at the expense of everywhere else, yet even though people not in the West struggle with systemic poverty, the Western world has been afflicted with various mental health crises that have largely been avoided elsewhere thanks to a continuation of traditional social networks that work to maintain communities. (38) These social frameworks certainly existed in the West previously, but with the decline of religion, there has been a decline in these social frameworks, which has not occurred elsewhere. (39) According to data collected by Pew Research Center, when controlling for age, sex, marital status, income, and education, the actively religious are still 5% more likely to say they are very happy than those that practise no religion. (40) However, explaining this by saying that religion is naturally better than a-religion would be short-sighted, for it is much easier to explain these results if religion is considered from a sociological perspective. Religious people are less likely to engage in harmful activities, such as drinking and smoking, they are more likely to be a member of nonreligious organisations, they are more likely to engage in charity work, they are more likely to have better relationships with their parents, and they are more likely to be politically engaged. (41) (42) All of these factors are also indicators of happiness when separated from religious beliefs. (43) The researcher in that study, Chaeyoon Lim, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, even went as far as to tell LiveScience "that [life satisfaction] is almost entirely about the social aspect of religion, rather than the theological or spiritual aspect of religion." (44) This is not to downplay the importance of genuine religious belief either, as genuine belief has also been proven to have some positive impacts on mental health, but merely to point out that some, or even most, of the good done by religion may be caused by the activities that it helps to facilitate. (45) (46) Therefore, even if it is true that mindfulness has discarded the Buddhist teachings of the mythology and ethical systems that make Buddhism into the unique philosophical and religious force that it is, mindfulness may still be filling a need left by the decline in religion in the West. There is a tendency in academia to disregard certain types of religious practices as being less valid than others, and while it is hard to classify mindfulness, it is also a mistake to completely disregard its effectiveness in filling a void in Western life. (47)

This leads to one of the fundamental problems that critiques of mindfulness often fail to address. Mindfulness fills a need in the Western world for a more spiritual approach to mental health, thus helping people feel better about their lives. Mindfulness courses, particularly MBSR and MBCT, tend to be delivered in large gatherings with many people by a charismatic presenter. (48) These parallels trends seen in protestant Christianity, with the charismatic Christianity movement encoding this ideal, which has likewise been able to avoid the decline experienced by other religious movements. (49) The rise of this charismatic style of spreading spirituality has been theorised by some to be a result of the proliferation of neoliberalism into all facets of life, as "market forces" are seen as driving all elements of modern life, even something as personal as religion and spirituality. (50) In the context of a market where religions compete for followers, the charismatic Christianity movement, global Islam, and neo-paganism can be seen as adapting well and "winning" the market. (51) (52) Similarly, mindfulness can be seen as the Buddhist version of this trend of religions changing to adapt to the new neoliberal order. It is particularly easy to see mindfulness as an example of neoliberal markets infiltrating religion since one of the main ways that mindfulness has been spread is through paid speeches at business conferences. (53) Under this framing, it makes sense that many elements of mindfulness not only fail to challenge the status quo but actively work to support it. Mindfulness can also be seen in the broader context of the rise of alternative spirituality in the Western world. Even if it does have questionable roots, it is still possible that the emergence of mindfulness could be a net benefit to the West. Some critics of mindfulness may counter by pointing to the orientalist nature of the movement, however, Western mindfulness has become so pervasive in recent years, that it has spread past the confines of the Western world and has begun to influence Buddhist traditions in turn. Places like the Centre for Mindfulness India, which claims to have helped over 20,000 people in India, are bringing a Westernised version of Buddhist teachings back to the areas where they once originated. What is most fascinating is that their website explicitly states that "Mindfulness has been practised for the past 40 years as a secular practice despite its origins in Eastern philosophy" and the website continues to highlight the secular nature of mindfulness overcoming any divides in people's identity (Centre for Mindfulness India). In this context, the strange relationship between Buddhism and mindfulness caused by secularisation and westernisation at the inception of mindfulness, which has been framed as a flaw by many scholars, is being presented as a selling point to convince people to sign up for the course. With this understanding, the creation of mindfulness can be understood as a Western adaptation of Buddhism, and while it may have been caused by neoliberal capitalism, that does not necessarily imply that mindfulness is an inherently bad phenomenon.

By understanding that Western mindfulness has evolved past being part of Buddhism, a more comprehensive and understanding image of the complexities present in both schools of thought can be created. As a former monk, Thupten Jinpa said, "It would be tragic if .. . the entirety of Buddhist practice is reduced to meditation, and meditation, in turn, is reduced to contemporary mindfulness" and this perspective seems to be the most fruitful. (54) While it is important to recognise Western mindfulness is derived from Buddhist practices, that does not mean it accurately represents even a small portion of Buddhism's complex ethical and spiritual systems. Buddhism is ethically and mythologically deeper than Western mindfulness, and there are currently no obvious attempts to change the way that mindfulness is taught. Therefore, it is better to consider Buddhism and Western mindfulness to be almost separate entities so that the impact of both can be better studied without getting lost in the obvious shortcomings Western mindfulness has in replicating Buddhist practice. By proceeding with this academic framework, the ways that Western mindfulness interacts with both the global north and the global south can better be determined so that the conversation surrounding mindfulness can move past comparisons with Buddhism and into new territory. In this way, academics can better study both Buddhism and mindfulness as they currently exist, rather than what they used to be. This is not to say that there are no shortcomings of mindfulness, however, its success in societies around the globe points to the fact that there are many positive elements too, which have been broadly overlooked up until this point. In short, while these two schools of thought may continue to influence each other and adapt over time, these adaptations and their impact on society can better be examined separately from each other.

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On Pascal

Joseph Israel

No extract of the *Pensées* has been more commented than the fragment "*Infini rien*" ("Infinity. Nothingness"), commonly known as "*Le Pari*" ("The Wager"). In this passage, Pascal famously displays a mathematical argument not to prove the existence of God, but to show that waging for God's existence is more reasonable than not. More precisely, choosing a life of faith is infinitely more reasonable than living indifferent to faith in God's existence. Phillipe Sellier, one of the many – and most recent – editors of the *Pensées*, chose to name this passage "*Le discours de la machine*" ("The discourse of the machine") in reference to a fragment of the "Ordre": "*faire la lettre d'ôter les obstacles, qui est le discours de la machine*". (1) (2) This choice interests me as it invites to look at the famous fragment through another conceptual prism, less commented on than the wager, that is situated at the end of the discourse. Pascal is done exposing the wager, and his interlocutor, after confessing he heard Pascal's point, now wonders what to do ("*Que voulez-vous donc que je fasse?*"). (3) Pascal responds that the origin of his interlocutor's impotence to have faith lies in their passions, and recommends that they apply themselves to the customs of christianity, that they follow those who have healed before them, and that faith will somehow come to them – or from them? – after a while.

When Pascal recommends applying oneself to the christian customs, he mentions that one of the effects will be "*l'abêtissement*". This term comprises our initial problem. It has a few translations in English that I will explore in the first part of this paper from an etymological perspective in order to situate the context of Pascal's thought. These considerations will lead us to elaborate on the relationship between *abêtissement* and faith. What did Pascal mean when he wrote that the remedy for unbelief – repeating the gestures and words associated with Christianity – leads to abêtissement? In other words, can the exploration of this term help us explain the transition from unbelief to belief through habit? Put succinctly, our first problem is that of the meaning of the term *abêtissement*, and our second problem is that of the role of *abêtissement* with regards to faith. I will consider various approaches to these problems, first developing Pascal's conception of the body's relationship to the spirit, before attempting to situate our enterprise in the more general conceptual framework of the Pensées.

The Problem of th*e Abêtissement*

It is important for our purpose to propose an understanding of the *abêtissement* before delving into Pascal's conception of faith. I will start with linguistic and etymological remarks which will allow us to clarify the term conceptually. In turn, this will lead to a precision of our problem, opening our initial interrogations to further preoccupations.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Pascal recommends his interlocutor to follow the practices and customs of christianity as a first step towards faith:

Vous voulez aller à la foi, et vous n'en savez pas le chemin? Vous voulez vous guérir de l'infidélité, et vous en demandez les remèdes? Apprenez de ceux qui ont été liés comme vous et qui parient maintenant tout leur bien: ce sont gens qui savent ce chemin que vous voudriez suivre et guéris d'un mal dont vous voulez guérir. Suivez la manière par où ils ont commencé: c'est en faisant tout comme s'ils croyaient, en prenant de l'eau bénite, en faisant dire des messes, etc. Naturellement même cela vous fera croire et vous abêtira.(4) (5)

Let us linger on the last term. Among translations in English, we find the abêtissement defined as a "[deadening of] your acuteness", (6) to "bunt your cleverness", (7) or "make you more docile". (8) The root of the verb abêtir is bête, which, before becoming a synonym of "stupid" or "idiot" in French, refers to the beast, the animal. This is what Pascal meant, and this is what most English translations lack: a neologism like "beastify" would be more accurate. (9) The last translation I mentioned might be closest to the original meaning, if we grant that docility is a significative, if not inherent, characteristic of animality.

What is the role of this tendency towards animality that Pascal seems to recommend? How does it relate to his account of the human condition, and more precisely to faith? Before answering these questions, it seems relevant to understand where this conception of the animal comes from.

In the notes of Phillipe Sellier's editions, Gerard Ferreyrolles precises:

S'abêtir ne signifie pas se rendre stupide, mais utiliser ce qui est commun à l'homme et à l'animal, à savoir la "machine" du corps, (10) pour incliner par la coutume "l'automate" à la croyance.(11) (12)

Indeed, in the notes of fragment 41, Ferreyrolles reminds us the concept of the machine, that is, the cartesian body (13): as Pascal writes, "*nous sommes automates autant qu'esprit*".(14) (15) In his conception of the automatic machine, Pascal refers to Descartes' bête-machine ("animal-machine"), the metaphysical concept that invites to consider animal bodies as functional mechanisms. Pascal thus presents a conception of human behaviour and faculties as equally mechanical and spiritual, which allows him to expand on the paths to access faith. What does it mean, then, to incline the automaton by custom? How does one come to faith by practising without believing? We now understand that using reason to understand faith could be a contradictory entreprise, as one does not attain faith through reason according to Pascal ("*non pas à vous convaincre par l'augmentation des preuves de Dieu, mais par la diminution de vos passions".)* (16) (17) Faith is not something to be understood intellectually, (18) but something to be felt, by doing. This point could feel like the end of our research, but the purpose of this paper is not contradictory. You cannot have faith through reason, but this does not necessarily entail that you cannot understand one's experience or account of faith. This is one of the complexities: if access to faith is necessarily corporeal (passions must be diminished, from Latin passio: "suffering"), it is all the more so because it must be coupled with the other "*pièce*", "*l'esprit, par les raisons*". (19) (20)

To further this point and restate our problem, let us recall Tolstoi's experience. In his Confession ([1882] 1987), Leo Tolstoy recounts his fall into despair and attempts to give a sense of the meaning he found in faith. In chapter 10, he writes:

And I came to love these people. (21) [...] I lived like this for about two years and a great change took place within me, for which I had been preparing for a long time and the roots of which had always been in me. [...] I realised that the meaning provided by this life was true and I accepted it. (22)

This "great change", Tolstoy continues, is inexplicable. (23) Tolstoy's narration of the path that led him to faith provides a fruitful exposition of our problem: it demonstrates that he discovered faith through custom, but that the explanation of his realisation of faith as the meaning of life remains totally obscure. So far, misinterpretations due to translation problems of the word abêtissement have been excluded. This has allowed us to clarify the conceptual meaning of the term, and at the same time to contextualise it. We can then legitimately reformulate an interrogation which in turn allows us to dig deeper: if the *abêtissement* is precisely a bodily phenomenon, or the result of the body's accustoming (or habituation) to certain practices, what are the implications for the mind/body relationship, firstly, and secondly, how does it relate – causally, that is – to faith?

Return to the Body, Return to Childhood

In order to understand the *abêtissement* and its relationship to faith (I recall: how do the means of believing abêtissent [make one more docile], and how does the abêtissement signify faith?) it is therefore necessary to elucidate Pascal's conception of the body in relation to the mind. We will first look at the nuances of the use of reason in the project of faith before understanding the abêtissement as a return to the body and to childhood.

Pascal proposes, as is well known, to let the heart act when reason reaches the limits of its domain. Indeed, the essence as well as the existence of the infinite Being of God are inaccessible to human reason, which holds its principles from the finite domain of the human body. This disavowal is not an exclusion: "two excesses. Exclude reason, admit only reason". (24) Nor is this disavowal an abandonment. It cannot be said, for example, that one would need to "[forsake their] human faculty of reasoning and [adopt] a purely mechanical mode of behaviour that puts [them] on a level with the animals". (25) Here, Moriarty lacks nuance in his interrogation, possibly in two aspects. Firstly, his interpretation could be derived from the – I argued – inaccurate translations of abêtissement understood as "becoming more stupid". The only thing Pascal actually says in this regard, is that the inchoative step towards faith cannot be made through reason. Nietzsche reaffirms it: "simple discipline of feelings and thoughts is almost nothing [...]: one must begin by convincing the body". (26) We will come back later to Nietzsche. Secondly, even if Moriarty understood the *abêtissement* as Pascal meant it, his comment seems to be motivated by the same fear that Pascal's interlocutor confesses ("*Mais c'est ce que je crains*" [But this is what I fear]). (27) This fear, if not that of abandoning reason as such, is perhaps that of abandoning what one believes to be the essence of one's humanity, that which distinguishes us from the animal, and which in fact distances us most from God and from ourselves. In fact, the abêtissement is not a distancing, let alone a distraction, but rather a return.

Léon Brunschvicg, another major editor of the *Pensées*, comments on the abêtissement with this idea of return in mind in the 5th edition:

S'abêtir, c'est renoncer aux croyances auxquelles l'instruction et l'habitude ont donné la force de la nécessité naturelle, mais qui sont démontrées par le raisonnement même, impuissantes et vaines. S'abêtir, c'est retourner à l'enfance, pour atteindre les vérités supérieures qui sont inaccessibles à la courte sagesse des demi-savants.(28) (29)

Again, this echoes Tolstoy's experience:

[...] the life force which returned to me was not new [...]; it was the same force that had guided me during the early periods of my life. In essence I returned to the first things, to the things of childhood and youth. (30)

Pascal says well that "*la Sagesse nous renvoie à l'enfance*" ["Wisdom takes us back to childhood"]. (31) (32) In the light of all of this, it seems that there is a conceptual thread that links abêtissement and faith through some sort of returning to childhood. Why does Pascal invoke the figure of the child in this context? As Brunschvicg advises, we have to remind ourselves that Pascal's words are those of a believer, not a sceptic. We need to understand the end of this aforementioned fragment in the light of Matthew, XVIII (2-4): (33) the child here signifies humility, and Pascal uses its figure to inverse the laws of our world. Voluntary abatement, submission, and lowering before God allows the divine force to tune in to this lowliness. (34) (35) As we saw, the *abêtissement* as a return to the body can be read not as a distancing from reason, but as the acknowledgement of its limits when considering faith. This necessitates humility which, more than a simple character trait, is one of the fundamental signifiers of greatness in the divine realm. Humility – alongside innocence, truthfulness, etc.– is an inherent part of the figure of the child in the Gospel of Matthew. It may be interesting to remember that some translate *abêtissement* to docility. (36) Interestingly, "docile" comes from latin *docilis*, which, from *docere* (to teach), means ready to accept instruction, culture or direction. I said already that this term was the closest to the original meaning because it echoes animality. Now, we might have discovered another advantage: the humility that Pascal praises in the recurring child, that same one that figures in Matthew, does not quite mean submission as alienation, but more as openness and welcoming. This, I believe, is the true humility of the *abêtissement*. Let us restate our question, then, with our progression in mind: how does one come to have faith?

Through the realisation of the limits of the domain of reason, through the diminution of passion; all this necessitates a return to the body, and can only be achieved with great humility. This humility in turn, I argue, must not be read as a miserable submission (Pascal's words could be understood as such), but as a certain docility, that is, the attitude that Pascal recommends, the one that leads to *abêtissement.* This last part of our answer remains obscure for now and needs further explanation: how, by understanding *abêtissement* as a return to the body and thus to childhood, can we discover faith? In other words, how does the figure of the child allow us to shed light on Pascal's practical recommendations?

Custom and Imitation: The Cultural Gesture

After a definitional diversion, we finally return to our initial question. How does custom lead to belief? How do we understand Pascal's answer, what tone does he really use, and why does he remain so obscure and concise? In fact – we have to unpack, leaf through, sew up – everything is there in the fragment. We shall first return to the crucial relationship between custom and nature before assessing the scope of the statement.

Let us remember a passage of Pascal's advice to his interlocutor. After recommending to follow those who have healed and found faith, he affirms that this will naturally make the lost sceptic believe, that faith will naturally come to them.(37) The use of the term "naturally" is important. It allows Pascal to reassert the intricate relationship between the cultural internalisation of religious practices (the education of the body to diminish passions) to the natural becoming of instincts ("*Et je suis fait d'une telle sorte que je ne puis croire".*) (38) (39) Later in the fragment after the discourse has ended, Pascal notes that "*la coutume est notre nature. Qui s'accoutume à la foi la croit*". (40) Here lies the crux of our problem, then. It seems that unravelling the meaning of this relationship between custom (culture, habituation, and practical modalities of custom) and nature (passions, instincts) will help us discover how practising christianity without believing will naturally incline us towards faith. Earlier in the *Pensées*, Pascal explains that "*la coutume fait nos preuves les plus fortes et les plus crues: elle incline l'automate qui entraîne l'esprit sans qu'il y pense*". (41) (42) When writing "*les plus crues*" ("crudest"), Pascal may have intended a play of words. "*Crues*" might mean "believed" or "crude"; in the second instance, it would refer to the latin *cruor*, which signifies blood, a symbol of filiation (the figure of the child) and of natural necessity. Earlier still, he asks: "*qu'est-ce que nos principes naturels sinon nos principes accoutumés?*". (43) (44) And in the following fragment: "*la coutume est une seconde nature qui détruit la première [...] J'ai grand peur que cette nature ne soit elle-même qu'une première coutume, comme la coutume est une seconde nature*". (45)

The merging of custom into nature is significant here: Pascal advances that natural instincts are learned, and can be constructed and deconstructed through custom and practise. This is why he can propose to his interlocutor to diminish their passions through the practice of christianity, and qualifies passions as the source of their impotence to faith. While passions may feel like the necessary, natural "instincts" that determine one's behaviour, Pascal argues that actually, repetitive practice and custom can educate the body to a second nature; more radically put even: "*la nature de l'homme est: Tout Nature. Omne animal*". (46) (47)

   A certain interpretation of this last fragment about human nature could help us conclude our understanding of faith as *abêtissement*. Interpretation through the conceptual prisms of the body and the animal enables us to link the question of human nature to that of the construction of our identity, and therefore to the processes that shape our relationship with the world on Pascal's ground. The first part of this essay has already covered etymological remarks about the question of animality in understanding *abêtissement*. Ferreyrolles notes about the fragment that Man is defined by "*sa capacité à s'identifier à tout animal (c'est à dire à tout être vivant)*". (48) By animal is meant not only the living being distinct from the human, but any living being, i.e. any animate body. In this sense, then, humans construct their identity as such from the very fact that they have "*aucune nature*" ["no nature"], by their capacity to practise and appropriate identities. (49) As we have understood, this mechanism of identification, that of culture, is carried out through the practice of tasks until they become instinctive, perfectly "natural". It seems that the tone used implies a certain ethical connotation. By identifying oneself – understood in the active sense of imitation – with the customs of the Christian religion and by repeating the models of the Christians, one brings about a moral and open attitude towards others. Here we find the openness of childlike humility. This childlike humility precisely concentrates the way of life that detaches humans from the slavery of passions and desires for glory or grandeur. This might bring up some criticism into our frame: not with regards to faith in general, not contra Pascal's system of belief, but precisely with abêtissement as the only mode of coming to faith. That Pascal's vision of faith is dogmatic, ideologically determined, biased by his very own beliefs, is not, however, our concern.

We needed to clarify an important term, so we did; it turned out that this term invited us to go beyond, so we followed it. In his paper assessing various philosophical accounts of the meaningfulness of human life, Christopher Hamilton concludes with Pascal, and opens with a remark I think relevant like to cite here:

Was Pascal right to suppose that we can put an end to our agony through cleaving to God? I do not know. But even those who might want to reply in the negative should nonetheless [...] acknowledge that his account of what leads us to need God in the first place is, in its general outlook at least, true. (50)

In fact, alongside its apologetic character, Pascal's more general recommendation invites an attitude that would allow humans to be in tune with their condition.

Endnotes

1. "After the letter That we ought to seek God, to write the letter on removing obstacles, which is the discourse of the machine" All translations from French to English are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

2. B. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 45).

3. Ibid., (Sel. fr. 680).

4. "You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and make you more docile" Here I use the translation from the 1966 Penguin edition, because it is the closest I could find to what I understand the abêtissement to be.

5. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 680).

6. B. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, trans. W. F. Trotter, (London: Dent, 1910).

7. B. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, trans. John Warrington, (London: Dent, 1932), [Everyman's Library No. 874].

8. B. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, (New York: Penguin, 1966).

9. I believe that W.D. Wetsel actually cites the closest translation in a chapter on Pascal (Wetsel 2016), but I could not access the reference, nor find it elsewhere, so I assume that he translated it himself.

10. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 41).

11. "*S'abêtir* does not mean to make oneself stupid, but to use what is common to man and animal, namely the "machine" of the body (Sel. fr. 41), in order to incline by custom "the automaton" (Sel. fr. 661) to belief."

12. Gérard Ferreyrolles in, *B. Pascal, Pensées*, (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2000), p.465.

13. Ibid., p.55.

14. "We are automations as much as we are spirits".

15. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 661).

16. "Endeavour, then, to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions."

17. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 680).

18. W.D. Wetsel, (2016). 'Blaise Pascal', in *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp.127–140.

19. "We must therefore make our two parts believe: the mind, by reasons [...]; and the automaton, by custom."

20. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 661).

21. L. Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, (London: Penguin, 1987), p.56. When referring to "these people", Tolstoy means "the believers from among the poor, the simple, the uneducated folk, from among the pilgrims, the monks, the Raskolniks, the peasants" , the people diametrically opposed to the bourgeois social sphere of "epicurean diversion" (ibid.) and entertainment Tolstoy runs away from in his quest for meaning.

22. Ibid., p.59.

23. Ibid., p.65. "When and how this change occurred in me I could not say."

24. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules,* (Sel. fr. 214).

25. M. Moriarty, 'Grace and Religious Belief in Pascal', in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Michael Hammond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), [Available at: https://philpapers.org/rec/MORGAR].

26. F. Nietzsche*, Considérations Inactuelles I et II,* texts established by G. Colli and M.Montinari, 1992.

27. Pascal, Pensées et opuscules, (Sel. fr. 680).

28. "*S'abêtir*" is to renounce beliefs to which instruction and habit have given the force of natural necessity, but which are shown by reasoning itself to be impotent and vain. "*S'abêtir*" is to return to childhood, in order to reach the higher truths which are inaccessible to the short wisdom of the half-wise.

29. L. Brunschvicg in, Gilson, E., '*Le sens du terme "abetir" chez Pascal*', in *Revue d'histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses*, 1e annee n°4, (1921), Juillet-aout, p. 338-344, (p.340).

30. Tolstoy, *A Confession*, p.65.

31. "Wisdom takes us back to childhood."

32. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 112).

33. "2. He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

34. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 680).

35. "*Si ce discours vous plaît et vous semble fort, sachez qu'il est fait par un homme qui s'est mis à genoux auparavant et après, pour prier ce Être infini et sans parties, auquel il soumet tout le sien, de se soumettre aussi le vôtre, pour votre propre bien et pour sa gloire, et qu'ainsi la force s'accorde avec cette bassesse*" Tr (Warrington 1932): "If [this discourse/speech] pleases you and appears convincing, know it has been uttered by a man who has knelt, both before and after its delivery, in prayer to that Being, infinite and without parts, before whom he submits all that is his, begging Him to subject to Himself all that is yours, for your own good and for His glory; and thus strength is made consistent with lowliness."

36. See *Pensées et opuscules*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer, (New York: Penguin, 1966).

37. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 680).

38. "And I am so made that I cannot believe."

39. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 680).

40. "Custom is our nature. He who accustoms himself to faith believes it."

41. "Custom makes our strongest and crudest proofs: it inclines the automaton that trains the mind without thinking about it."

42. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 661).

43. "What are our natural principles but our accustomed principles?". Importantly, "les principes se sentent" ("principles are felt"), Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 142).

44. Ibid., (Sel. fr. 158).

45. "Custom is a second nature which destroys the first [...] I am very much afraid that this nature is itself only a first custom, as custom is a second nature."

46. The nature of man is: All Nature. Omne animal ("Every animal").

47. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 523).

48. "Its ability to identify with any animal (i.e. any living being)".

49. Pascal, *Pensées et opuscules*, (Sel. fr. 523).

50. C. Hamilton, "Frail worms of the earth": Philosophical Reflections on The Meaning of Life', in *Religious Studies*, 54, (2018), pp. 55-71, (p.15).

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Practices of peace for new beginnings between Theravada Buddhists and Saiva Hindus of Sri Lanka

Rojeni Ramanathan

The Sri Lankan Civil War

The Sri Lankan Civil War was an ethnic war between the Sinhalese and Tamil members of Sri Lanka. The war started in July 1983 when "the LTTE killed 13 soldiers from the Sri Lankan government's military group, which led to the black July riot which killed thousands of Tamils." (1) The gruesome civil war took place because the conflicting actors were fighting for an independent nation. The two conflicting actors, LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), who were mainly Hindus and wanted Tamil nationalism and the Sri Lankan Government, who wanted Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

During the 25-year-old war an approximation of "70,000 people were killed" (2) and a major natural disaster occurred, the Boxing Day Tsunami, which hit Sri Lanka on 26th December 2004 and "killed over thirty thousand people." (3) Rawat observes that even "this disaster could not bring the warring factions together." (4) Indeed, the Sri Lankan ceasefire agreement of 2002 ended in the aftermath of the tsunami, in 2005, due to the assassination of foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar who was Sinhalese. (5) In 2006, a peace talk took place in Switzerland between the two conflicting sides. However, nothing too little changed. In 2009, the civil war ended as the Sri Lankan government killed the LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran. Hence, we can understand that the war ended in a biased way, favouring the Sri Lankan government because they were one of the conflicting actors and they did not pay the price for their war crimes. In order to end a national or international level war, the two conflicting actors must be put into place as they both were in the wrong and must find peace because the conflicting actors' actions have hurt and killed many civilians in Sri Lanka. In the case of the Sri Lankan Civil War this did not happen because the Sri Lankan government was favoured and because of their political identity governing the country they only saw the LTTE as a threat and they did not try to end the war in a peaceful manner instead they took violent actions to protect their ideologies which results in massive casualties of civilians.

Were there any peace efforts taking place during the Sri Lankan Civil War?

During the Sri Lankan Civil War, international actors played a significant role in fighting for peace between the conflicting actors, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Norwegian peace mediators conducted a peace mediation policy, a "Pawn of Peace" between 1997-2009. During these seven years, there was only peace between "the conflicting actors during 2002-2003 in which a ceasefire agreement was conducted." (6) The ceasefire agreement broke in 2004-2005 when the military commander, Col Karuna of the LTTE group had a fall out with his team and "amidst the LTTE accusation of collusion between the government and Col Karuna" there was a further "suicide bomb blast in Colombo." (7)

Jiwon Lee, a Junior fellow at Yale University in the Department of Political Science, argues that "the ethnic minorities in Sri Lanka are actually under similar conditions in which they are subject to the central government dominance." (8) Even today, the ethnic minority groups of Sri Lanka still face discrimination. In the Guardian Newspaper, Journalist Hannah Elis-Petersen and Rubatheesan Sandan wrote the article, "We want justice, not fuel: Sri Lanka's Tamils on north-south divide," which looks at Sri Lankan Tamil women" protesting for the return of their family members who disappeared during the war." (9) The topic presented in this article shows how Tamil ethnic minority groups in Sri Lanka have still not had their justice from the civil war, because their family members from the war are still missing hence, Tamil ethnic minorities are still victims of the Sri Lankan Civil War.

Non-Governmental Organisations' approaches during Sri Lankan Civil War

Karuna Centre for Peacebuilding is a non-profit organisation that uses peace and mediation approaches of healing and reconciliation for national and international level conflict. During 2003-2005, the Karuna Centre for Peacebuilding created a leadership and reconciliation program for "all ethnic groups and regions of Sri Lanka." (10) The organisation conducted peacebuilding efforts through "dialogue training for youth workers, dialogue training for Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim religious leaders." (11) What is so significant about this training program is that it took place during the Norway ceasefire agreement, which led to a two-year peace between the conflicting actors. However, the Sri Lankan Civil War continued until 2009; therefore, was this program useful?

This program gives a foundational but limited understanding of peacebuilding and mediation because it only looks at the personal experiences of religious leaders and participants. The program needs to dive into the importance of religious practices and spirituality. Therefore, I will look at fresh solutions for cultivating peace, which is interreligious peacebuilding for the Sri Lankan Civil War through connected religious practices and traditions for Hindus and Buddhists of Sri Lanka. I will examine the ritualistic practices of both religions and the significance that religious identity holds for the ethnic groups.

Interreligious Peacebuilding

Interreligious peacebuilding and mediation is a new branch of peace and conflict studies that presents religion as a resolution for any conflict. Mediators use religion to identify the parallel practices between a country's major religions and how conflict actors must practise their beliefs through normative ways. In Sri Lanka, the two major religions are Hinduism and Buddhism which map onto the ethnic conflict. Therefore, using interreligious peacebuilding as a mediator for the Sri Lankan Civil War could have solved the conflict earlier and created a bridge between the two conflicting actors: the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and the Sri Lankan Government.

Scholars in faith-based policies and international relations, Dr Sarah Silverstri and Professor James Mayal, explore the role of religion as a force for conflict and peace.(12) Silverstri and Mayal look at Galtung's argument of "cultural violence" (13) for how "different factors such as religion, ideology, language and ethnicity become intertwined to create discrimination." (14) So conflict occurs through "a set of motives" which leads to cultural violence. Therefore, in the case of the Sri Lankan Civil War, we can understand that even though it was an ethnic war, the concept of language and religion played a significant role.

However, religion can bring peace through "religious beliefs/values, religious leaders and faith/based organisations", which promote peace by looking at similar values presented between major religions of the country that have a national level conflict. (15) Through NGOs and volunteers, religious peacebuilding and mediation methods have grown rapidly as a force for national and global level peace. Hence, interreligious peacebuilding for the Sri Lankan Civil War could have brought peace nationally for Sri Lanka.

Further, Scott Appleby, a Historian of Global religion and conflict, argues that religion emphasises healing as "the sacred." (16) Appleby explains that religion as the sacred comes from a range of "dialectical experiences of the sacred through a direct epiphany of mystical functions." (17) As well as through "common liminal experiences of symbolic frame of ritual." (18) Hence, mystical experiences present the spiritual and theological value of the sacred and the ritualistic framework expresses emotion and religious values and both common and mystical experiences present religious values of compassion, love, equality and faith.

   Appleby creates a unique formula of what any religion must contain to be justifiable as sacred. Appleby says, "religion embraces a creed, a cult, a code of conduct, and a confessional community." (18) When analysing the formula, we can see that the creed is the foundational basis of any religion, which includes the beliefs and values of life and creates rituals as a symbolic practice for the community.

In a religious context, a "cult" is defined as "any system of externals (such as beliefs, rites, and ceremonies) related to the worship of a deity, or any deified object, person, place or event." (19) Therefore, for Appleby a "cult presents the notion of devotion and prayer" (20) and spiritual discipline, which presents "a code of conduct of rules and regulations that any social group must have as sacred principles." (21) Thus for Appleby, religion is considered sacred by having rules and regulations to make the confessional community grounded.

Owen Frazer, a researcher in peace and conflict study, and Mark Owen, an academic scholar in theology and religious studies who researches inter-religious faith as a practice for reconciliation and peace, explore the role of religion through the use of "society by looking at five significant factors that make up religion as an actor in mediation: ideas, community, institution, symbols and practices, and spirituality." (22) These factors intersect with one another in using religious mediation approaches to bring peace. As a result, religion can be represented as a coin; the analogy presents the notion of one side of the coin being peace, the connector, and the other side being the divider, the conflict.

Frazer and Owen's five significant factors of mediation correlate with Appleby's religious formula of creed, cult, code of conduct and confessional community. In Frazer and Owen's (2021) diagram, the institution dimensions present a religious organisation that holds all the annual events of the faith and has a set of rules and regulations. Hence, it correlates to Appleby's (2000) notion of a code of conduct because religious organisations must all have a set of principles they follow.

Saiva Hindu and Theravada Buddhist practices of Sri Lanka

Hindus define devotion using the Sanskrit word "bhakti" as the emotional aspect of love and compassion for the deities. Through Bhakti, you can gain "good karma and gain spiritual knowledge." (23) Buddhists define devotion using many terms in the Pali language, which are "pema (affection)", "saddha (faith)" and "garava (respect)", which means "feelings of love and affection directly towards the teacher who shows the way of freedom from suffering." (24) Therefore, Sri Lankan Hindus and Buddhists show devotion through rituals of worship and offerings to express generosity, love and compassion to their deities or, in the case of Theravada Buddhists, the Buddha and the deities.

Further, Anthropologist Marcel Mauss explores the theory of "Gifts" through reciprocity. (25) Mauss argues:"gift giving is a structured communication, economic, moral and religious system which presents a multidimensional phenomenon.

The exchange of objects between different social groups builds a strong relationship between the people and groups." (26) Mauss' view of the gift presents a substantial value of what the gift means for society. This concept of "reciprocity of exchange" is essential to sustain any relationship. (27) Hence, Hindu and Buddhist devotees use offerings as a way of reciprocity by creating a relationship between human and supernatural beings. Hindu devotees gain prosperity, blessings, and good karma from the gods by giving gifts to the gods. Buddhist devotees gain good karma and merit-making by offering gifts to the Buddha statue and the deities.

Offering Gifts to the deities is also an act of worship because Hindu and Buddhist devotees express their generosity and faith through giving. Cartman explores the act of offering by Hindus in Sri Lanka in his work, Hinduism in Ceylon, in which he explores how lay Hindus bring offerings to the temple as gifts which are "plantains, coconuts, milk, rice, camphor, flowers, limes, betel leaves and areca nuts." (28) All these foods or fruits given as offerings to the deity have symbolic values of purity in Hinduism. In many Hindu temples, even Sri Lankan Hindu temples, we see a ritualistic element of "lay devotees offering fruits or food to deities and taking part of it back home."(29) This ritual shows that when the "priest is conducting the puja, the priest blesses the offerings and, in return, hands over Prasada, blessed food or fruits back to the devotee" show the significance of purity known as sattva in Saiva Hindu tradition. (30) This reciprocity of gift exchange presents the religious relationship between the deity and the lay devotee.

Further, In Hinduism, coconut and milk are gifts given to Gods because they symbolise good luck and prosperity. (31) By giving them to God in return, they will gain prosperity and blessings from the gods. The colour "white" in these "gifts" symbolises purity. (32) The symbols of colour in Hindu ontology are found in three parts known as the three gunas: sattva, rajas and tamas.(33) "Sattva is purity, knowledge and harmony, rajas are passion, action and energy, and tamas are impurity, laziness and darkness." (34) The colour white is in sattva because it symbolises purity and cleanliness; therefore, when offering gifts to deities, they must be pure and sweet.

Moreover, Theravada Lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka make offerings to the Buddha statue or the Buddha image to gain merit and to show compassion to the Buddha. AGS Kariyawasam, in his works, Buddhist Ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka, explores the offerings made by lay Buddhists as "bowl or vases of flowers, incense, joss, sticks, beverages, fruit drinks, medicinal items and oil lamps." (35) These offerings symbolise sweetness and happiness and can be given through "almsgiving (dana)" to the monastic community as well; lay Buddhists must first conduct a Buddha puja. The Buddha puja is when "selected portions of all offered at the dana are offered to the Buddha." (36) Dana also takes place after a "pirit ceremony which is a ceremony for protection" in which monastic members chant to remove all evil spirits and bring prosperity and good life. (37) Therefore, through the almsgiving ritual, lay Buddhists gain good merit and good karma that can help them in samsara to be re-born in a good state.

Anthropologist Bryan Pfaffenberger argues that the "annual pilgrimage" of the Kataragama shrine brings unity between Tamil Hindus and Sinhala Buddhist traditions as they both worship the deity Skanda or Lord Murugan. (38) Lord Skanda or Murugan is an important God in Hinduism because Lord Murugan is the son of Lord Shiva, "who for Saivites is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of all the supreme gods of the universe" (39) and Lord Murugan, a warrior figure god who can help devotees with all their problems. Sinhala Buddhists view Lord Skanda as a God who will later on become the Buddha. For both the Sinhala and Tamil community of Sri Lanka, Lord Skanda presents the concept of a protector and guardian of Sri Lanka. Rituals of Kataragama pilgrims present the unity of Skanda's marriage to Valli Amma, and this element of unity is present in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Tamil Hindu pilgrims of Sri Lanka express religious devotion through the concept of grace. Pfaffenberger defines grace as "a salubrious emanation or ambience which attaches to those who own the temple and pay for the rituals." (40) So, grace is an expression of pleasance which brings a positive aura and guards the family against evil.

Gananath Obeyesekere's article, The Fire-Walkers of Kataragama: The Rise of Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka explores how Tamil Hindu and Sinhala Buddhists express devotion through expressive actions by conducting a fire-walking ritual for Lord Murugan or Skanda.

The fire-walking ritual originated from Saiva Hinduism by Anakurri Sami, who introduced this ritual in Sri Lanka in 1912. The ritual occurs as "the devotee must be fully cleansed and walks the fire, the devotee enters the main shrine, where the Sinhala priest (kapurala) gave him some sacred water."(41) In this ritual, we see the importance of the Hindu philosophy of balance between fire and water because they are elements which make up the universe of "the five bhutas which are fire, water, air, wind and earth." (42) This ritual was initially only for Hindus. However, Sinhala Buddhists became attracted to this ritual through how "Wijeratne Sami, who studied occult sciences, decided to walk the fire without asking permission and later became the first Sinhala pupil to understand the fire-walking ritual." (43) Through this ritual, we see the importance of devotion for Hindu and Buddhist devotees of Skanda or Murugan. Therefore, the fire-walking ritual is a significant ritual for devotees of Sri Lanka to show their devotion and bhakti through expressive action.

Therefore, the parallel practices of offerings as gifts and annual pilgrimage are very significant for inter-religious peacebuilding because we can use this concept of gift-giving to enable both ethnic groups, the Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus, to exchange gifts with one another during their annual pilgrimage, which will then create a new peaceful beginning between the groups. As well as enabling both groups to embrace each other's cultures, traditions and faith.

Ethnographic research in Theravada Buddhist and Saiva Hindu communities

I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork of four semi-structured interviews: two with male interviewees, a Theravada Buddhist and a Saiva Hindu priest, and two with female interviewees, a lay Buddhist and a lay Hindu. All four participants are based in London but are of Sri Lankan origin. Each interview took around 30-60 minutes. In order to protect my informants' identities, I have given all my informants pseudonyms, and I will use pseudonyms throughout this analytical study. In order to conduct these interviews, I had to obtain Ethics Approval at King's College London.

Scholars Anthony Naaeke, Anastacia Kurylo and many others explore ethnographic fieldwork through the emic/etic distinctions as "emic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is a member of the community being studied. Etic perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community being studied." (44) Many anthropologists have looked at how a researcher can present both an emic and an etic approach to their ethnographic research. Therefore, When I conducted these interviews, I did not know their emic views and what was going on in their minds. So I have faithfully presented my etic view through the thick description presented in a table and contextualised their answers to the best of my ability.

I consider myself an insider because I am a Sri Lankan Hindu and fluent in the language spoken by Sri Lankan Hindus, Tamil. (45) I also consider myself an outsider in some interviews because I am not a part of any Theravada Buddhist organisations based in Sri Lanka. (46) As an insider, a significant advantage is that some participants trust me, and I know them, they can feel comfortable with me, and because the interviews took place in tamil they felt more comfortable with their answers. (47) As an outsider, I got different points of view from my informants because of their role in society which was quite interesting because their answers were similar and different in many ways.

As an insider, there is an increased chance of being biased because of my subjective knowledge of the faith; however, I had this in mind in my research and took a more objective approach by being open-minded to all their answers, and I asked my informants to be as accurate as possible.

Pseudonym	Description
Gayomitha	Gayomitha is a Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist Monk based in London who wore an orange robe with a reddish maroon jumper. The interview took place in a Buddhist temple. The temple had an orange theme and a peaceful aura. The interview took place in a room with a huge beautiful white Buddha statue, and many yellow, white and red roses and flowers presented as offerings to the Buddha and a stupa "which is a sacred monument which is associated with the Buddha" was found on the left-hand side of the Buddha statue.
Thavanesh	Thavanesh is a Sri Lankan Saiva Hindu priest based in London. I went to my family temple and approached Thavanesh and asked him if he would like to conduct an interview with me about interreligious peacebuilding. Thavanesh gave me his number and told me to come to his house to conduct the interview. So, I took a chaperone with me and conducted the interview with Thavanesh at his home. Thavanesh wore a purple *"veti"*, a Hindu religious outfit worn by priests below the waist, and his upper body was bare. He wore a string around his upper body, known as the sacred thread that signifies belonging to the Brahmin Caste, the highest caste in Hinduism. Thavanesh had three lines of *"thiruneeru"* or *"vibhuti"* on his forehead to symbolise that he is part of the Saiva sect of Hinduism. *"Thiruneeru"* is made of sacred burnt cow dung. A cow is a holy animal in Hinduism because a cow is Lord Shiva's residing vehicle, placing substantial symbolic significance in Hinduism. Thavanesh also wore a religious beaded necklace around his neck.
Thanusha	Thanusha is a Sri Lankan lay Sinhala Buddhist in London. The interview took place at her home with a chaperone. In the house, Thanusha had a small white stupa placed next to a small Buddha statue, and at the entrance, there was a plate of a Buddha image with the Sinhala language written around the Buddha. So I asked, "What is this image in your house?" and Thanusha said, "this is the Sivali Buddha, and we believe that this Sivali Buddha will always have food in the house." Therefore, we can understand that food for Sinhala Buddhists is emphasised as a nurturing aspect of life.
Sadhana	Sadhana is a Sri Lankan lay Hindu in London. The interview took place at her home with a chaperone in the living room. Sadhana wore a "red bindi" on her forehead and a *"red bindi"* on the top of her forehead to symbolise that she is a married woman. In Hinduism, colour symbolism is significant as it intertwines religion, culture and tradition.

All four interviewees promote interreligious practices of Hinduism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, these practices in all four interviews are similar and different. I will look at the core themes that came up in my interviews and suggest that these themes provide the building blocks for interreligious practice: family and ritual identity, traditions and peace.

Family and Ritual Identity

Both family and ritual identity are key themes presented in both lay religious communities. Ritual identity is presented through offerings as an act of devotion which links to anthropologist Marcel Mauss's understanding of Gifts.

When asked about ritual and identity, Thanusha responded

I went to Kataragama pilgrimage last July with my family because we went to my husband's aunties' puja where elephants came, people doing Kavadai and before going to kataragama we must shower and be vegetarian. During the pooja there's ringing the bell. Wearing drums and a special umbrella for the Buddha and the bhikkhus carrying the Buddha and Skanda on the elephant. The bhikkhus conducted the puja. For the puja I brought flowers, a Buddha flag and a fan and we made milk rice and brought it to the deity and the Buddha as offerings.

This statement shows that Thanusha is giving a personal account of attending the Kataragama Pilgrimage in Sri Lanka with her family and shows the importance of offerings made to the Buddha as gifts to gain good merit. It also shows the importance of ritual objects in the act of devotion. We see the use of anthropologist Marcel Marcel's concept of the gifts as a "reciprocity of exchange" in which offerings are an act of devotion given to deities and the Buddha. In exchange, you gain good karma and blessings from the Buddha and Skanda.

Similarly, we see the concept of ritual identity in Sadhana's response,

We show devotion to God through the analogy of how we dress and present ourselves beautifully, therefore I decorate my prayer room beautifully with religious objects, and images of deities with flowers as the way I want to dress myself beautifully.

This statement shows that Sadhana is giving a symbolic analysis by presenting a materialistic aspect of beauty and the importance of ritual objects presented as beauty. She decorates her prayer room with ritual objects that make the deities happy and symbolise beauty and positive energy.

The theme of family is presented in both lay communities.
Sadhana presents the theme of family as,

In Saiva Hindu tradition we see a family aspect in Gods and Goddesses and this family view has important value, for example: Lord Shiva is married to the Goddess Parvathi and their children, Lord Ganesh and Lord Murugan.

Sadhana presents the concept of family in Hinduism in analogy to the family hierarchy presented in Hindu deities to show the significance of the family as a sense of unity in Hindu culture and tradition.
Similarly, we see the family theme presented in Thanusha's earlier response on her attending the Kataragama pilgrimage with her family. So, we see the importance of family unity in the lay Buddhist community as a strong sense of expressing faith through the strength of family. Both lay interviewees have their own families and use religion and culture to show the importance of family in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Traditions

Lay Buddhist Thanusha discusses the importance of tradition and culture through colour symbolism which correlates to Hindu ontology.
 Lay Buddhist Thanusha present tradition through cultural attire

We pray to the Buddha every day at home. We dress only wearing white to the temple.

AGS Kariyawasam's work, Buddhist ceremonies and Rituals of Sri Lanka, in which Kariyawasam explores Buddhist devotees offering food and objects for merit-making. Kariyawasam says, "one would wake up early, bathe and clad oneself in clean white garments, and go to the nearest temple." (48) Therefore, when going to the temple, a devotee must be entirely pure through washing their hair as well as wearing white. We see Thanusha going to the temple in white attire to show the importance of purity and cleanliness in Theravada Buddhism, which links to the symbol of colour in Hindu Ontology as the colour white is "sattva for purity and cleanliness." (49) Therefore the similarity of colour symbolism presented in Hinduism and Buddhism shows the importance of tradition in both of these faiths.

Peace

All four interviewees adhere to the importance of peace, but some view peace in a spiritual context. In contrast, others view peace through meditation. Therefore, embracing a religious "peace" for national and political "peace" creates an overall unity between the Tamils and Sinhala communities of Sri Lanka.

Thavanesh responds to peace as,

When we pray to God without us knowing we gain a sense of peace. That is the reason why we go to temple. We are going to temple to find peace with God.

From Thavanesh's response, we can understand the importance of spirituality for peace as it's connected to Scholars Owen and Frazer's understanding of spirituality is "a personal experience that provides a sense of purpose and connectedness to something greater than oneself." (50) Therefore, Thavanesh's response explores the connectedness to God to find one's peace, to find solutions to personal suffering, devotees come to the temple, and so, we can use this concept of spiritual peace in a broader context of national peace to solve political conflicts by asking conflict actors to view their religious values spiritually to find the meaning of peace for them.

Similarly Sadhana responds to peace as,

When we go to the temple we must be silent because the temple must be peaceful.

Sadhana explores the importance of peace in a religious place because it brings positive energy and vibrations. The temple is presented as a compound of hope. We must protect the compound by following rules and regulations of being quiet because the sense of silence can bring warmth to devotees and respect to devotees' prayers. Sociologist Appleby, who explores religion as sacred because social groups must have "a code of conduct, rules and regulations as sacred principles." (51) Hence, religion's spirituality and the institutional aspect is interconnected to show the importance of faith and hope for religious communities.

Further, Gayomitha responds to peace as,

Peace for Theravada Buddhism is to respect Buddhism, control the mind and practice meditation. As a Monk I had to peace the problems created by citizens but this did not affect my path.

For Gayomitha, peace is related to meditation and controlling the mind.

As a monk, we can understand that meditation is essential for Gayomitha as a route to becoming enlightened to find the truth, the Dharma. Meditation is a practice used to control the mind. You gain a sense of peace; therefore, religious practices such as meditation are key for interreligious peacebuilding between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka.

Similarly, Thanusha responds to peace as,

In Theravada Buddhism peace means to be relaxed and the mind to be relaxed. We do meditation as a way of finding peace.

As a result, we can understand that the Theravada monastic and lay communities share the same understanding of peace through meditation, linking to how the Buddha statue is presented to show the Buddha meditating. So meditation can bring peace to the Sinhala community in Sri Lanka.

   Overall in these interviews, the lay communities were able to speak openly about their views on religious traditions, culture, peace and their own religious identity; however, the monastic and priesthood community kept their answers short, and the reason for this could be because of their status in society as a priest and a monk. So they felt that their answers could affect their image. Hence, they have briefly answered the questions.

Considering everything, I propose critical ideas for an interreligious policy by creating a workshop on gift-giving and the reciprocity of exchange between the Sinhala and Tamil communities of Sri Lanka. As a result, participants will express their ritual identity to each other by exchanging gifts and showing love, compassion and gratitude.

For the Sri Lankan Sinhala and Tamil communities, the Kataragama Pilgrimage is a uniting force because both religious groups worship Lord Skanda or Murugan. Anthropological Scholar Pfaffenberg argues that the Kataragama Pilgrimage "has risen in stature recently among Buddhists to the point that the worship of Skanda is second only to that of the Buddha; Hindus continue to regard the gods as the culmination of the deities and as the supreme object of human devotion."(52) Therefore, Pfaffenberg emphasises the significance of the Theravada Buddhist and Saiva Hindu unity of devotion and faith for Lord Skanda.

Similarly, from my ethnographic research, Lay Buddhist Thanusha explains the importance of the Katargama pilgrimage and how she describes her experience as a pilgrim to the holy temple. Thanusha says,

I attended the Kataragama pilgrimage for a puja with my family and I bought flowers, a Buddha flag and a fan and we made milk rice and brought it to the deity and the Buddha as offerings.

Hence, we can understand that Thanusha explored the importance of ritual identity for Theravada Buddhists by attending the Kataragama pilgrimage with offerings to show her devotion to Lord Skanda and the Buddha.

This concept of making offerings to the deity can be used in an anthropological context of giving "gifts" to the deity, and so, through gift giving, the devotees gain blessings from the deity, and the deity gains devotees' reverence; therefore, we see a reciprocity of exchange taking place.

Considering this idea, an interreligious workshop for peaceful beginnings for the Theravada Buddhist and Saiva Hindu communities of Sri Lanka. This workshop will take place near Kataragama because the Kataragama pilgrimage is the uniting hub for all ethnic groups of Sri Lanka. In this workshop, participants will learn the importance of gift-giving and exchange gifts with one another. They will talk to each other about their religious and ritualistic identities of faith and how their faith expresses peace, grace, love and compassion to create a peaceful bond between one another. Hence, through the study of peace we can create new beginnings of interreligious peacebuilding therefore, religion could have acted as a peace mediator for the Sri Lankan Civil War.

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An Interview with *Project Myopia*'s Rianna Walcott

Annie McCormack

Dr Rianna Walcott is a "Postdoctoral Associate in the Black Communication and Technology Lab in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland" who "co-founded projectmyopia.com, a website that promotes inclusivity in academia and a decolonised curriculum" [taken from http://www.riannawalcott.com/].
Our Co-Editor, Annie McCormack, spoke to her about inclusivity in the academic space and the need for change, reform, and empowerment.

Annie: Thank you for doing this and collaborating with me; it's nice to see two people with similar projects being supportive, something I love.

Rianna: I think it's important that we do because who else will do it? It's the kind of thing that now I have left the UK, the academic context is different, and I don't know how long I will be here [America] (it depends on whether or not I start to enjoy the company, which feels unlikely right now). Obviously, I work in Academia here [America]; they are asking different things. In many ways, it's a lot better; I think I want to remain connected to where I come from and to the academic context and needs of the UK.

A: I guess it feels like sometimes some of the older generation in academia, I'm mostly in biblical theology, can feel out of touch with new opinions, young people, and people on the margins. It's nice to find a community.

R: I am impressed with King's TRS and how they have followed up [from a guest lecture with Rianna for a module in TRS]. It's so easy for them to go, "ok, we've hired a black girl to come and talk about this stuff. We have done our duty." But for them to follow up, I like it.

A: Yeah, personally, I have only ever been at King's, but they are good at challenging both privileged and underprivileged voices and good at moving with the times.

So, the first question is: How have you created a space for your unique voice in academia?

R: I think it has worked in two ways, really. Firstly, Project Myopia is interesting because it relies on asking for academic support in creating these spaces: funding, time, and space. That works within the institution to improve the institution, but it is a fallacy in some ways because it relies on goodwill and money. Sometimes goodwill and money are very necessary to do this work.

I also feel like a lot of the work that I have done in making academia a palatable space for people like me has been working counter to academia's aims and carving space for myself without permission. I have always said the best learning I have ever done has been at kitchen tables with my peers. We used to put on writing retreats together where we would rent an Airbnb, get together, and write together. That's always been when I have been my most productive and learned about academia's actual inner workings. There's a lot of stuff about it [academia] which is not intuitive to people who are not from academic backgrounds. So much of it is an old boy's network and about who you know. The further you get in academia, the more times you realise that people on your course have foundations in academia, and people may have parents who are doctors and grandparents. They know exactly how this all works.

Meanwhile, when I started my PhD, I was basically gifted a PhD For Dummies book from my boss. I just didn't know all of these things; some of it has been really important in talking to others in my position who have gone further than me. Things like having mentors and a peer network – your mentors aren't just your direct superiors but future colleagues too, which is really important.

Also, making sure that if you want to be in academia, it represents you in a way you want to be represented. Part of this may be thinking about non-traditional ways of presenting research, conducting research or putting specific ideas in your work that may not be traditionally considered academic. That can just be as simple as centring things like black feminism in your work or principles of ethics and care that aren't necessarily considered important to academic work.

A: Would you say it's about a certain type of humanness and kindness?

R: Yeah! I like that, a certain type of humanness.

Because I think a large part of what academia's goals are about presenting one type of humanness as academic, obviously, academia is aimed at being a comfortable and productive space for cis-het-patriarchal-white men, right? That's who academia is designed to support and uphold the intellectual work of, so just by virtue of being an outsider to that, of being on the margins, there is work that needs to be done to make what and people like me, think even legible in that context. There is a lot of work just to make people understand.

A: I guess I come at this in terms of emotions. Do you think there is room for anger in academic work?

R: Absolutely! Yeah, one hundred per cent. In fact, that is a really important tenet of black feminism in that sense: You should be able to express yourself and your self-defined experience. I think there has been so much in academic work that is so antithetical to that, the idea that to define your experience and to be angry, or even to centre the self (when the self is not a cis-het-white man) is to not be academic.

The idea that you would be angry is supposed to take away from your ability to be rational.

A: The enlightenment rational-irrational divide remains.

R: Exactly! The idea is that the only intellectuals and those able to contribute to public discourse would be those who are 'rational' white men. I think that having skin in the game and having an actual connection to the work you do is a benefit to me.

A: In a similar vein to the non-traditional, A lot of what I like to look at concerns non-traditional vernacular speech being used in academic writing.

R: I love that, yeah.

A: So, I know in America, they call it AAVE [African American Vernacular English] in academia, and a lot of queer speech has certain words used only in that vocabulary. Do you think there is space for that?

R: That is a huge part of what I care about in my work, actually. My research looks at language and discourse, particularly online, but also thinking about how offline cultures and digital space mediates our discourse so that we end up with what we have and the way we speak. A lot of my work over the last few years in an academic context has been thinking about neuro-divergence and what is considered 'academic', who gets to speak and how they get to speak. I think that there is obviously such a large [art of this which ends up being really racist and colonial and hetero-patriarchal because there is one idea of an academic way to speak. This is very limited; there is only one way of speaking that people acknowledge as intelligent, academic, and rational. I love to challenge that; I think it's really important that we do challenge that, so the way I do that in terms of my work is thinking about "what are forms of engagement and intelligence that are not necessarily recognised in an academy context?"

Part of that is that in academia, the journal article is King. If you're not writing a single-authored, which is a really important article, you're disadvantaged. In order to get a job in the future in America, I need to have a single-authored monograph. That is one of the requirements for tenure. I wouldn't even get hired unless I had a certain number of journal publications. The amount of work I do in terms of speaking, outreach and lectures, things for public good and working with students. Things like this the unpaid labour that is not considered valuable to my career. That is just a little cute extra that I do, that is not going to get me anywhere, but I think that those things are incredibly important, if not more important. What is the point of our work if it is not reaching students and the people that need it? I prioritise doing that kind of work more to the detriment of my career, and I think that this kind of work, making your work legible to that kind of audience, is so much more important.

Especially in the work I do, I am writing about black people online. If black people can't understand it, read it or access it, what is the point? There is literally no point. So, if I'm writing about black Twitter using overly academic language that makes it inaccessible to the people I am writing about, that is a betrayal. That is worse than being useless; that is cruel, so why would I be taking these things out of their intended context?

The idea then becomes, who am I writing for? Am I writing for a white academic audience? Why would I do that? That is not the point of my work, so I think that being able to access these different registers and speak to the people you are writing about for and to is really important, and I don't think that academia always accommodates that.

One of the things that I have tried to do over the years is think about different formats. One of the few publications I have that came out in 2021 was an 'in-conversation' published in a journal article.

A: It is also a great way to make it more human, which I like.

R: Yeah, more human! It's casual, we are swearing in it, we are being honest, and I think a lot of that is missing from academia as it is. There is a worry about whether this will be legible for my career. Will anyone consider this an academic publication? Does this count as academic?

A: What does that do to your own image of yourself? You are giving so much of yourself for free without gaining the career benefits.

R: I'll tell you, it doesn't feel great, but I think I have done my best to ensure that my interests still put food on the table. One of the things I am thinking about right now is a piece on labour and about invisible labour, who it benefits and who has to do more of it, and how academia can make restitution in these cases. So it is on my mind very much. I have actually done a fairly good job of ensuring that it is monetised. I don't think that everyone can do that, and I'm not always able to do it.

A: How are you able to do it?

R: It's stuff like for Project Myopia; I insist on paying everyone who writes for us. That is the culture of the institution I want to be dominant; I want it to be clear that we pay people for labour. I also put in my email sign-off that I do not want requests for free labour. I ensure that there is a fee before I accept a lot of the talks I give; unless it is a good cause, then I will do it for free. I think I have been very lucky; even my job now is rare and supports what I do outside. The fact that I have this political outlook is probably what got me the job. This is what I mean when I say America is asking for different things in academia. We wouldn't even dream of a lot of the stuff they are already doing here [America]. For example, the writing lab I work in has a monthly event where we watch a film, and dinner is provided. The lab always has free food, drinks, a fridge and a microwave for students to come by. That's the kind of thing I can't even imagine in a British academic context, having a space to decompress, talk about, and vent about academia. We are always putting on free events. And the fact that academia in America, the concerns I have about curriculum in the UK don't really make sense here. I just got here; I have already made my own course. There were no restrictions on what I wanted to teach, and I chose everything that we studied. Everything. Even PhD students do that here. Obviously, there are the course you have to take, but usually in the UK there are very few people who are making the courses and there is a lot of very strict assessment. Here [America], you can assess how you want; if I wanted to have no one ever write me an essay, I could do that. I could do it so that everyone gives a presentation or a speech. I could mark that, and no one would be checking how I marked it; I made my own rubric. It has its negatives because standardisation is difficult; it's tough, but at the same time, I'm sure you can see the overwhelming positives of that, which gives people so much more freedom.

A: Especially for something so embedded in the idea of freedom and activism itself. There are modules at King's where there are still boundaries that you have to operate within.
There seems to be a lot of new stuff going quite well for you. Do you think a new academy is being created? Do you think there can be?

R: Yeah, I do. I think a lot of people are working very hard to make it happen. I think that the new academy has to be more collaborative than the old one; there have to be more conversations between the new and the old scholars because, right now, it is still a bit of an old–boys network. There is no room for something to happen unless someone dies.

A: It is the kind of cycle of life that comes into a cycle of careers, which should never be conflated.

R: I feel like the conversations about it are different to when I was an undergrad. When I first started Project Myopia, I held a meeting with the staff in the department, and I just remember them being so hostile to what we were talking about, practically snickering in their seats. They were really not interested in what we had to say, really offended at the idea that we would have a problem with what we were being taught. I remember one guy being outraged when we talked about micro-aggression. He was so upset by the notion that using the n–word in a class or something like that was going to hurt some students. The stuff we were asking for was just so basic compared to what we are asking for now. I cannot even imagine explaining a micro-aggression to someone in this day and age, can you? You wouldn't have to; that conversation is done.

A: I think these things are quickly becoming unacceptable to enter the sphere of academic conversation. It is becoming less appropriate to be more traditional and more appropriate to be open–minded to new ideas and new people.

R: There's lots to do to take these directions.

A: Switching more onto yourself, you call yourself a black feminist; I'm wondering how your journey began with that and how you found your home in black feminism.

R: This is actually tied up in my research journey as well. When I was in Edinburgh, in this thoroughly white space that didn't have black academics or even just black people to talk to, I ended up turning to these Facebook groups. At that point, it was a very radical moment; a lot of student politics were starting to heat up, and I was starting to get more interested upon coming back from America for the first time and really mobilised by racial politics in America and England. It made me start thinking about all of these things and talking about all of this stuff, and I was just trying to get my head around feminism, which was very undeveloped at that point; it was really basic, and I wasn't very radical.

I remember that black feminism started to appeal because I remember being so dissatisfied with white feminism. In my personal life, I was finding that difficult to reconcile, and finding it difficult to be in Edinburgh and deal with racism from white women when we were both in the same feminist groups. That's when I found all of these black Facebook groups and black people talking about black things, particularly black women. I think it just stuck with some of the reading I first started doing when I was initially thinking about Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins; I just found that so much of it resonated with me. It was a really helpful moment.

A: Do you think it's an emotional experience as well?

R: Sure, for me, so much of what I do is personal. Everything I have chosen to do has always been from a personal perspective. I started Project Myopia because I was dissatisfied with my experience in academia. I started 'Colour of Madness', my mental health work because I was going through depression and was dissatisfied with my experience and how I was being treated. Everything that I do has always had this very personal lens for me. It's not something that I can separate myself from, and it's not something that I desire to separate myself from. This is another reason that black feminism fits me so well because it makes the political personal; it accommodates these understandings that we have to be allowed to define our own experiences and be allowed to speak for ourselves and that we have to be deeply tied up in our own liberation. All of that is so important to me.

A: I'm reminded of a quote by Cremieux, "All liberties are sisters" My deep belief is that you cannot support queer rights without supporting black rights, or you cannot be feminist without understanding the impact of Asian violence during coronavirus, for example.

R: Exactly! I also just think that another black feminist tenet is that none of us are free until the most marginalised of us are; if we start from the bottom, it will be good for everyone. For me, white feminism was not starting there. It was often, "We'll get to that."

A: I think people are often threatened in dealing with this below them.

R: It makes them the villain. You have to be comfortable being the villain sometimes.

A: Yes! We all carry privilege, to a greater or lesser extent, and we all have to understand this.

submissions@journalforinterdisciplianrytheology.comTo be an academic and not be comfortable with that framing, I have to know that I have massive privilege; I have done well for myself. It is not common for black women to be able to stay in academia in the way that I have; this is not to say that I have the kind of privilege that other academics have. I have managed to make this pay the bills; I did, and not everyone does. I am still figuring out how to make sure that I get paid for my labour. I am privileged enough not to have to work for free a lot of the time. This is a privilege. It shouldn't be!

A: Yeah, which is part of the unpaid/forced labour definition.

Finally, I will ask what I would like to ask everyone about: what is your karaoke song? You won't have to perform it, so don't worry.

R: If I had a regular one, it would be something like Sir Mix-a-Lot's' Baby Got Back'. But I have had an actual karaoke triumph because I had a really embarrassing moment in Year Seven where I did a talent show at school and I sang Alicia Keys 'You Don't Know My Name' and brought along a flip-phone so I could do the bit in the middle where she does the talking. I had a wedding this summer where I was a bridesmaid, and we went to karaoke. And it was time to undo that trauma because it was not the right thing to do at age 11 at a new school with mean boys. It was exactly the right thing to do when you're 27 in a karaoke bar absolutely mashed up with your favourite people. I really gave it my all, and I killed it!

Biblica Corpora
Reading Rebecca Rafael – Fifteen Years Later

Paul Claxton

Rebecca Rafael's 2008 *Biblica Corpora: Representations of Disability in the Hebrew Bible* is an ambitious study, combining analysis of the representation of disability in selected texts covering every major genre of writing in the Hebrew Bible, with an overarching argument about what this representation tells us about the nature of God within these texts. It is Rafael's first monograph, and she has since gone on to publish a number of articles and book chapters on further intersections and specialisations within the topic of literary analysis of disability in the Bible. *Biblica Corpora* stands out as one of relatively few comprehensive, structured studies by a sole author, on disabled representation in the Hebrew Bible, rather than a compilation of essays by various authors with various angles as we see in *This Abled Body (1) and Disability Studies and Biblical Literature (2)*, or in the commentaries in *The Bible and Disability; A Commentary*, (3) in which a different author tackles the commentary for each book of the Bible.

   I encountered Rebecca Rafael's 2008 *Biblica Corpora: Representations of Disability* in the Hebrew Bible whilst trying to get a sense of academic thinking around representation of disability in the Hebrew Bible. I was writing at the time on Genesis 32:22-31, the story of the patriarch Jacob encountering the divine and coming away from that encounter limping, with a dislocated hip.

I was seeking to develop an argument around why this story so rarely appears as an exemplum for divinely bestowed disability; the sort of story we might see in a medieval *consolatio* for the benefit of its disabled reader. When looking through literature related to my interests, I was looking out for anything within Biblical Studies that centres ideas about exemplarity and/or disability; so literary understandings of, or storytelling about, disability. I was greatly excited to discover *Biblica Corpora*, as Rafael uses 'primarily literary methods of disability studies' (4), and the third chapter of her study specifically looks at narratives of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Genesis. A great analytic strength of the study is Rafael's clear understanding both of the nuances of contemporary terminology in Disability Studies, and her thorough biblical scholarship and understanding of the Hebrew text. She carefully navigates distinctions between disability and impairment, and considers the terminology of the Hebrew Bible, such as classifications of 'blemishes' as seen in Leviticus, mental illnesses seen in Kings and the Prophets, and focuses in on the regularly appearing Hebrew trilogy of 'blind'(רוע), 'deaf" (שרח) and 'lame' (חספ).

The monograph is centered around a methodology of representational analysis which Rafael applies to representations of disability from literature from Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Job, Psalms and Isaiah. This concept is taken from W.J.T. Mitchell's "Representation"; Rafael defines representation quoting Mitchell as "a triangular relationship: representation is always of something or someone, by something or someone, to someone" (5), becomes a highly organisational tool for the text. Firstly, it brings together the range of often highly disparate types of writing that are covered; so long as disability is representing something else (most of the time according to Rafael), or is being represented by something ('representative point of view remains the Normal'), a discussion of the text is appropriate, 'no matter the genre of a given book or passage' (6). Secondly, Rafael's thesis, which she affirms in her introduction and conclusion, is derived from the idea of representation – if disability in the Hebrew Bible always represents something else, then what? Rafael notes a difference between her text and the line of argument we see in Mitchell and Snyder's *Jesus Thrown Everything Off Balance: Disability and Redemption in Biblical Literature*: 'They point to social conflicts, but my interest lies in how disability terms, figures, and images contribute to the Hebrew Bible's representation of God. In a nutshell, God is Normal.' (7)

To understand why the language of the Normal is significant to Rafael's argument, it is helpful to be aware of the work and existing language within the still fairly new field of Disability Studies within Biblical Studies. Rafael seems to be building on terminology and ideas presented by Wynn in her essay, *The Normate Hermeneutic and Interpretations of Disability within the Yahwistic Narratives*, published in Semeia Studies' *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*.

Rafael draws extensively on this anthology of essays which she herself reviewed and which was published in 2007, one year before the publication of *Biblica Corpora*; she positions herself in relation to the arguments of its various essays as we have seen quoted. We can see that the argument that Rafael builds around the Priestly Normal, mostly in the second chapter of Biblical Corpora, is a clear progression and incisive use of existent ideas about the Normate. Wynn outlines this concept as it relates to Biblical Studies:

> Contemporary interpretation of disability within the narratives attributed to the Yahwist shows that a "normate hermeneutic" dominates modern biblical thought. The term "normate" was coined by Rosemarie Garland Thomson and refers to the socially constructed ideal image 'through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings." [...] In traditional American culture the normate is an able-bodied white Protestant male heterosexual. (8)

This line of argument is not integral, or even present, in all the sections of the book, but we do see it clearly in the second chapter, which deals with representation of disability in Priestly literature, mostly Leviticus, and also in Deuteronomic writing. Rafael illustrates how the categorising of disabilities that we see almost uniquely in Leviticus, creates a 'Priestly Normal'. The Priestly Normal, although describing a category as described in a specific literature, sounds a lot like Wynn's normate; 'It is a male body of a specific ancestry, having no visible blemishes' (9). This Priestly Normal is a result of the stringent requirements laid out in Leviticus, mostly outlining what a priest's body should not be. It is a Normal which can only be maintained by the rigorous but as Rafael notes, entirely possible, bodily regimen suggested by these outlines. This established, Rafael's argument that God is Normal follows; she argues that, especially due to the eschewing of visual iconography, priests are the 'visible representatives of God'; in other words, 'if priests must be god-like, then God must be priest-like' (10). According to Rafael, Deuteronomy also constructs God as 'normal' in opposition to a disabled category that must be regulated or suppressed, but where in Leviticus this representation was played out through the surface of the human (priestly) body, in Deuteronomy it is in contrast to non-Israelite gods, or 'idols'. Rafael is perhaps slightly less persuasive here in picking out examples of Deuteronomic formulations of idols as 'disabled', and her focus on God as superlatively able-bodied on a sense-basis (in contrast to material idols, he can see, hear and act), might be better placed in assessment of the more obviously sensory God of the Priestly source.

The third chapter deals with the books of Genesis and of Job. Rafael here is considering disability as a narrative and aesthetic device. Her analysis of Genesis covers the whole scope of the book, from the primordial Edenic curses of Genesis 3, up to the prevalence of male blindness and female infertility in the patriarchal ancestry up to the beginning of the Joseph cycle.

The study is extremely clarifying in its careful identification and categorising of disability. For example, she identifies that 'God's curse on the serpent is the first disabling in the Hebrew Bible' (11). By cursing the snake 'upon your belly you will go', some locomotive ability that the snake previously had has been reduced; the removal of ability is characterized as a curse, and so this is a disabling curse. Another insight Rafael brings out from Genesis is the gendering of patterns of disability; in the Patriarchal cycles, blindness seems to be the definitive male disability, and infertility the defining female disability. This eye to categorisation is paramount in Rafael's analysis of Job too. When reading around exemplarity and disability in the Bible, I have often felt frustrated by the prevalence of Job as an exemplar in historical writing intended for disabled people, given his only bodily affliction, an unnamed skin disease, is temporary. Rafael keeps this historical literary context at the forefront, stating 'to the extent that the book [of Job] has been used to tell people how to experience a disease or disability... the history of this use falls under the purview of the history of disability' (12). However, she notes that whilst the 'ancient author' would not have thought of Job as disabled, under the current most prevalent model of the social model of disability, Job is certainly disabled. The book of Job, she points out, places him in a social sphere; and his affliction clearly significantly impairs his daily life.

Rafael says of this chapter in her own outline, 'I analyse the narrative and dramatic features of disability representation as it also represents God' (13). What the representation of disability says about God, in this chapter, however does not seem to have as much to do with the argument for God as Normal. Rafael concludes her studies of Genesis and Job, 'In Genesis, the disabled human representationally props up the powerful God, not the other way around. In Job, God seems strangely insecure about whether his power can make it on its own, independent of how a given human body fares' (14). Rafael again has recourse to Mitchell and Snyder's work for her terminology, in this instance their 2000 study *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (15). Referring to a 'propping up' of God here is in a narrative sense; she states that both the texts of Genesis and of Job 'exemplify narrative prosthesis in the sense that their plot hinges on disability' (16) . There seems a little disjunction between this narrative function of disability in these books, God's implication, and making conclusions as to God's nature. Whilst the arguments that the plots of these book hinge in a very great extent on disability, and that God is 'deeply implicated in the disabling of the human figures' (17) are clear, it feels a leap that Rafael does not provide enough arguments for, for this to point to a conception of God as dependent on these disabled figures. This being said, Rafael does elaborate on this idea, returning to it in the fifth chapter. Here she makes a stronger case, explaining that the central point that the third chapter makes about the representation of God is that Job's abjection is a part of the way in which 'the disabled body is constantly pressed into service as God's opposite number' (18). This is an idea we will review in more depth when considering the fifth chapter and evaluating the thesis of 'God as Normal'.

Chapter four, concerned with the Psalms and Isaiah, looks at the representation of disability as rhetoric. Here we return to a denser language of representation, befitting to the more densely rhetorical and dialogical genres. In the Psalms, Rafael says, 'the speakers represent God, and this representation is inseparable from the speaker's self-representation [...] the speaker represents him-/herself to God, and simultaneously represents God to God's self' (19). Clearly, this chapter is a source for much of Rafael's argument for the representation of disability in the Hebrew Bible contributing to its representation of God. It is important to Rafael who is disabled, and how their identity within the world of the Bible intersects with their disability and relationship with God. The focus on rhetoric continuing in her study of Isaiah, she first looks at the application of disability rhetoric to a collective peoples. In the opening speech of the book, the people are collectively described as wounded, with the wounds comprising the entire body to the extent that there is no part left 'Normal' in any body. She then picks out where deafness and blindness are properties of individuals, identifying how the prophet uses terms such as 'blind' and 'deaf' for the powerful individuals they are criticising. Ultimately for Isaiah, as for Job, Rafael says that disability is a mode of representing right (unimpaired) and wrong (impaired) communication, almost always with God. Rafael's final note on Isaiah is to argue that Isaiah's eschatology of healing and transformation represents a solely negative valuation of disability. If any of the imagery she discusses in Isaiah were to value disability 'as a neutral variation or a positive contribution to the diversity of human embodiment', then why would a Normal body be projected as 'the only kind in the ideal future'? (20)

Rafael's conclusion of her study construes the entire of the final chapter. She first reaffirms her thesis that 'God is Normal'. She then reviews the outcomes from select previous chapters, reorganising her findings to clarify the links between disability and major concerns of biblical writing; these major concerns here being power, holiness, and Israel's election. This section does clarify her ideas about what representation of disability say about God, by honing on specific concepts and bringing together chapters that otherwise may not feel cohesive. It is overall an incredibly impressive and persuasive synthesis. Returning first to the narratives of Genesis, she emphasises the room made for God's power by the recurring motifs of the barren woman and the blind man; both types of disabled patriarch/matriarch allow for God's role in the propagation, conception, or selection of the elected line. Returning to Isaiah's eschatology, Rafael links her chapter again to Mitchell and Snyder's work. She brings to bear Mitchell and Snyder's evocative phrase 'dreams of similitude' in reference to Isaiah's eschatological visioning of an afterlife with no disability. Describing this as a 'fantasy of uniform unchanging bodies that codifies a rejection of the varieties and contingencies of actual human embodiment' (21) reminds us of Rafael's earlier observations of how much bodily regulation is required for a 'Priestly Normal' in Leviticus.

She makes a particularly thought provoking and insightful point around the relationships between anthropomorphism and ableism for the Deuteronomic God. She notes that despite the disembodied nature of God of the Hebrew Bible, he does have a gender (male) and does speak. When thinking of representation of God especially in terms of how it might related to a Normal in terms of human bodies, 'it is not enough simply to look for a lesser degree of body imagery in direct divine attributions' (22); sensory attributes, such as speech, are human attributes to ascribe to God; and God is ascribed the attributes of the 'Normal'. Ultimately, she sums up her concept of God as Normal at the end of this section, saying 'the Hebrew Bible represents God with the abilities it most values in the human (male) body... To show that God is real and holy and powerful, the disabled body is constantly pressed into service as God's opposite number' (23). In the final section of the chapter, Rafael returns to her stance of representation of disability in the Bible as negative; she expresses her reluctance to seek to redeem the text or seek readings of the Hebrew Bible in ways that may be affirming for disabled people, and points to parallels with 'attempts' at feminist readings of the Hebrew Bible. This is a positionality that sometimes goes unsaid in modern Bible Studies, and is clearly expressed. In my own approach to the Bible I glean a lot of pleasure in reading the Hebrew Bible in a way that is affirmative both in terms of my own disabled and transsexual perspective, and so do hold a belief that the text can be redeemed from these positionalities; but Rafael's position here is strong and the study is all the better for its being stated.

I hold some reservations around the argument for God as 'Normal', both as represented by Rafael and in relation to how this argument does and doesn't appear elsewhere in contemporary disabled writing about the Hebrew Bible. Often this argument, other than as I detailed in the second chapter where she deals with Leviticus, feels tacked on at the end of different and more persuasive lines of thought. This is the case again in this concluding section; for example, she makes the persuasive case that in Genesis 'both the plot and the representation of God's power and Israel's election' are propped up by disabled figures; but then adds after this a sentence simply stating that 'at the same time, God is represented as the Normal, as the non-disabled', without substantiating this with reference to the bible or her own previous arguments in the same way she did for her previous insight. She doesn't attempt in the chapter or in her concluding review to link some of her chapters, such as her study on rhetoric in chapter four, to this thesis. More recent scholarship, furthermore, seems to counter this idea of God as representing an all-able Normal. A reference point for me would be Joy Ladin's 'Knowing the soul of the stranger', from the 2018 study, 'Homosexuality, Transsexuality, Psychoanalysis and Traditional Judaism' (24).

She looks at the narratives of the relationship between God and his people in the Hebrew Bible, examining God's incapability to establish his place in the Israelite community; he is a hyper-minority who must be accommodated and yet the Israelites repeatedly fail to do so. James Diamond's 2007 'God the Supreme Outsider: Indwelling (Shekhinah) as Metaphor for Outdwelling' (25), is another example of this type of redemptive reading of the Hebrew Bible which may feel affirming for minority identities including disabled people, but also seems to run contrary to the idea of God as 'Normal'. Rafael clarifies that 'Normal is an ideological construct, not our colloquial sense of normal as roughly average or typical' (26); nonetheless, she does go on to reaffirm that the concept of the Normal is borne out of a selection of idealized human traits and experiences. If this is the paradigm we are working with – and it is a useful and informed one – then biblical exegesis that reaffirms that God 'does not fit and has no place in any human or natural order' counters the idea of an able-bodied God. (27)

These reservations are not necessarily as much criticisms as reflections of how thought provoking and stimulating I found this study. Rafael's scholarship is thorough, and yet despite her use of much technical language both from the fields of Biblical Studies and Biblical Studies, and use of Hebrew, her clear explanations and building up of her arguments make this a study that a wide range of readers may enjoy. Perhaps the greatest strength of the monograph is Rafael's ability to pick out focuses in the different books that she chooses to study, and bring entirely different axes of representation to our attention in each chapter, whilst still having coherence as a self-contained study. Due to its impressive mix of scope and depth, and clear scholarly theses that are in conversation with debates that are still in continuation, this book should be considered essential reading for anyone interested in the intersection of Disability Studies and Biblical Studies. As Rafael asserts, 'the Bible contains the mother-lode of disability representation in Western culture' (28); and so is an incredibly important resource for anyone interested in the history of disability representation.

Endnotes

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25. James Diamond, "God the Supreme Outsider: Indwelling (Shekhinah) as Metaphor for Outdwelling", in *Converts, Heretics and Lepers: Maimonides and the Outsider*, Ed. James Diamond, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

26. Rafael, *BiblicalCorpora*, p. 136

27. Ladin, "the Stranger".

28. Rafael, *Biblica Corpora,* p. 15.

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