

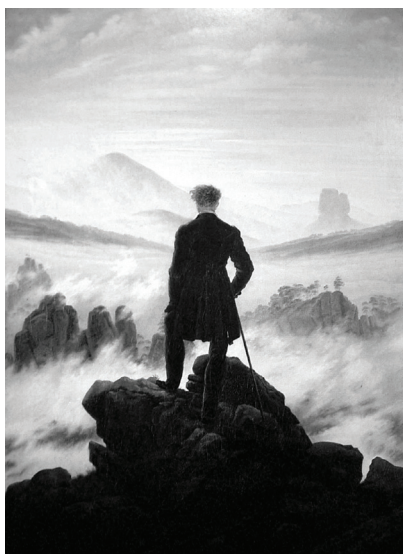


Lost Piece

An Undergraduate Journal of Letters

Volume 1, Issue 1:

What's To Know, Rhetorically Speaking





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Lost Piece

An Undergraduate Journal of Letters

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Something of a Mission Statement

From the Editors

Lost Piece exists to facilitate undergraduate reading, discussion, and writing of an intellectual nature without any threat of distraction either by classes or by the grade point average.

The goal of Lost Piece is to combat mediocrity in all things, and particularly in all things intellectual. Its hope is to encourage legitimate and personally initiated intellectual activity.

Lost Piece holds that the goods proper to intellectual activity are ends in and of themselves and are to be sought regardless of whatever recognitions that may or may not be extrinsically attached to such activity.

Just Write:

An Introduction to All This

Stephen Lechner
Class of 2011
Editor in Chief

You are looking for something. I know it. There remains some ambiguity as to the specific identity of that something—indeed, even for you, you who are apparently the person looking for it to begin with—but that you are looking for it, whatever it is, there is no ambiguity. You have picked up a copy of this journal, so it is definite: you are looking for something.

And who are “you”? You are an undergraduate at a nationally renowned research university.

As such, you are someone in the process of acquiring a top-of-the-line education, but an education that is highly specified—indeed, more specified than the education of anyone who has graduated before you, for that is where education

today is going: research. And research is specific.

As such, you are the intellectual type—the type who studies, the type who reads, and, at least historically speaking, the type who writes. Your reputation, you will find if you ask your parents, friends, Jack Mc-Whoever down the street, or his sister Jane, is that you can think. And why else should a blue-gemmed ring help you to get a job after graduation? Aesthetics?

As such, you are also young, which is to say that you are curious, energetic. You have a whole life ahead of you and a whole world around you. You have been told that you are the future of human kind, and although it is, admittedly, a funny way of putting it, you know that there is something to that. Thus, you take the world to be your responsibility in some form or another.

So you want to make a difference in this, your responsibility, the world; and being the intellectual type, you know that this begins with understanding the world, sizing it up, knowing how it operates. But your education, as you know, is highly specified, and whether you realize it or not, this troubles you—“I’m supposed to understand the world. And I do understand it: I understand the biological makeup of every microorganism discovered and that if such and such bacterium replicates at such and such a rate in this or that organism, such as myself or my dog Fido, trouble may occur. But how does my understanding of the world have anything to do with that of Barbara, who can lecture me for three hours as to why, when I drop my backpack, my laptop will either not break or break or simply explode depending on whether I’m standing on the ground, a table, or Hesburgh Library when I drop it. And what about Jerry,

who seems to think it necessary that I understand how I can know anything at all and that I can offer and sustain a definition for everything from ‘bad’ to ‘banana split’ to ‘burgeon’? These are all ways of understanding the world—but of understanding all of it in a coherent way? Can I, and my fellow undergraduates with me, understand the world enough as a whole to have responsibility for it?”—And all this while, I would like to remind you, you are looking for something.

No?

This “you” isn’t you?

You sure?

Well, I must have made some mistake then. Sorry about that. I thought you were someone else. It must have been the look on your face. You look just like one of them—those people I’m trying to find. But hold on. Could you do me a favor, now that the damage has been done—the awkwardness established—and you and I have already

been talking for ten minutes thinking we were old friends? Could you find one of those people I'm looking for and give them this journal? You will? Well thanks. Yes, you can usually tell them by the look in their eyes—a kind of thought going on deep down, just without the concrete look of an answer. What's that? No one around? Oh, well that's fine then. Just be sure to put it back where you found it so that they can get it later. But be quick though—you don't want someone walking in and catching you with it. They, too, might mistake you for a "you".

What?

Yes?

This "you" is you?

Well why didn't you say so to begin with? Embarrassment?—"True, I'm looking for something, but it's all too strange to be looking for something when I don't know what it looks like, to be missing what remains a mystery even to me. How can I

be sure that I'm missing something when I don't know what it is that I'm missing?"—But you are looking for it (I have already said that that is definite) and if you were missing nothing, why would you be looking? That itself is enough, enough to be sure of its absence, even if you are alone as you look for it. And you are not alone; I am writing you so that "we may know that we are not alone".

Regardless, I've been trying to find you for some time—you and others like you. The important thing is that you are looking. What that means is that you have found something missing—a student at a top-of-the-line university and you have found something missing! A hole in the wall, a cavity. What is it? Who knows? In fact, it's the one thing you don't know—you have the rest of the picture already but a piece of it is missing, and there will be no way to recognize it, what it looks like—this lost piece—until you find it and,

placing it where it belongs, you solve the puzzle.

There are some who are not looking for it, this lost something. And why? Perhaps they have it already. Perhaps they are still early on in the puzzle. Perhaps they are satisfied with the picture as it is, despite the gaping void. Does it matter? The fact is that you are not satisfied without the whole picture, which is why you are reading now.

And so I write you, here, now. I am writing you, an undergraduate, a searching undergraduate, an invitation, a welcoming, a challenge to join me and a community of others like us to look for it, this something. For all the while that you have been searching on your own, there have been students coming together these last three years to help each other search. There are no fewer than five groups, the five that have begun this journal: a discussion group called Tea, The Philosophy Club, The Orestes Brownson Council,

a literary society of students from the Program of Liberal Studies, and a literary society labeled by the original name of That Thing.

By their own initiative, these students have read and discussed whatever matters they thought to be pertinent to their position as students and as persons. They have worked together to try to ask and answer the questions that need asking and answering, and have written in order to bring these questions and these answers to you. They have written in great variety, and with effort the editors of this journal have organized their writing into four issues for publication.

It is with great pleasure now that I invite you to partake in our search, whether that mean by reading the essays, poetry, and stories that these writers have given to you, or by joining one of these groups in active discussion, or by writing on your own for future editions of this journal. I invite

you to partake in the goods proper to intellectual activity without the distraction of the grade point average. I encourage you to take advantage of this brief time as a student—perhaps the only time in your life when you will have this real opportunity to read, to discuss, and to write about what matters. And perhaps, perhaps if you do take this advantage, then one day you may have reason to look back upon Our Lady's dome a head taller than those who took their education to be cheaper than yours, those who did not search but preferred an education limited to a diploma. ❀

Limits

A Brief Conversation

Brennan McLoughlin
Class of 2010
Program of Liberal Studies

If you're like most people, you probably use your senses a lot. You scope out the shape and texture of the things around you, and generally try to use that information to understand your environment. You might even be using your senses right now. Well, it turns out that there are quite a few people who question exactly how accurate our everyday understanding of the world actually is. It seems that when we take in that information from the senses, we do a few things to it before we even get the chance to think about it. Space and time themselves may even be inventions of the human mind. This particular question interests me a lot, so if you're interested, we can take a quick walk through the

basics of this idea. At the end, I'll tie it back to our everyday lives, I promise.

So in the late eighteenth century, a philosopher named Immanuel Kant published a hefty book on metaphysics. Before Kant, more or less, scientists had busied themselves trying to find out the laws of the universe. Ever since Isaac Newton's discovery of the Law of Gravity, it had been the general idea that objects in the world obeyed immutable laws, and it was our job to find them out. Kant turned that all on its head. We don't really know anything about the world, Kant suggested; all we really have is what we receive from the senses, secondhand. We take that sense-information, and organize it to fit our own needs. One of the most important points Kant made was that space and time themselves are created by the human brain. When we

discover truths about how the world works, what we're really discovering is the intricacies of the human mind.

What does it mean to say that space and time only exist in our heads? There have been developments in modern physics that have given some credence to Kant's claim.

You might have heard about some physicists arguing about the "shape" of the universe, whether it's spherical or saddle-shaped. Okay, imagine a piece of paper. You can draw a stick figure or something on it if you want. That piece of paper is two-dimensional. If the stick figure walks in a straight line, he'll hit the edge of the paper. Now, connect two edges of the piece of paper to make a cylinder. Now, if the stick figure walks around on the paper, he can return to where he started. In the same way, our three-dimensional space might be curved, so that if you take your spaceship and fly far enough in a straight line, you'll come right back

to where you started. This is a simple example of just one of the theories out there, but this and other scientific oddities like quantum nonlocality suggest that the three-dimensional world we encounter might not be the best way to account for all the phenomena in the world.

So what would it look like to live in a world without three-dimensional space? One possible answer comes from nineteenth-century psychologist William James. He quotes another scientist who had studied the effects of brain removal on pigeons. (Imagine applying for that research grant!) For the lobotomized pigeon, "every object is... only a space-occupying mass, he turns out of his path for an ordinary pigeon no otherwise than for a stone. He may try to climb over both." Imagine what the world might look like to that pigeon, who had no way to organize the information she got from her senses. It might be dizzying, like

a kaleidoscope. It might be dull, surrounded as it was by vague blobs and shapes. To the brainless pigeon, the world is without form, and her fellow pigeons are as much a part of the ground as any stone. The pigeon has no way of distinguishing one object from another.

Those of us who have brains, on the other hand, do distinguish things. Our minds divide things into spatial (and temporal) objects. We couldn't deal with the sheer amount of information we get from our senses if we didn't organize it. Space is just a way of organizing things: we say that one thing is "next" to another. Furthermore, we have to focus our attention on one thing or another in order to get by. This is not controversial. We have peripheral vision, after all, because at any given moment there are some things at the center of our vision that we are focusing on. Because of this, James notes, our experience is only partial. This is neces-

sitated by the nature of space and time: by distinguishing one thing from another, we make a choice, and in doing so, we particularize our experience. We are as incapable of seeing a world without space as we are of concentrating on everything in the field of our vision. One of these days or nights when you're walking outside with your neck bent straight ahead or down, look up for one brief moment and try to see the whole lofty sky, all of it at once, and you'll see what I mean.

So, as I hope you're seeing, space and time are just ways to divide up our experience. In the same way that you can look at two dots and a half-circle and extrapolate a smiley face, it's just as natural for us to create time and space from our experience. James says, "Dots dispersed on a surface are perceived in rows and groups. Lines separate into diverse figures. The ubiquity of the distinctions, this and that, here and there, now

and then, in our minds is the result of our laying the same selective emphasis on parts of place and time." We see forms and vague shapes, and we give them sharp edges. We do this for time, too: we bind moments and events, and give them edges as they "begin" and "end."

Did you buy any of that? Is it plausible that we can't help but invent these divisions among things, in space and time? Do you think it's possible that the world is without form and void until we come along and create, and divide the things from the things? That in the beginning of our cognition is the word, which we use to term one thing "pigeon" and another thing "stone"?

Maybe you do buy it, and maybe you don't, and maybe you've heard all this before and have been rolling your eyes this whole time. Or maybe you have to think about it some more, and decide if I'm full of it or not. This is the end of the descriptive part of this conversation, so if you need to take

some time, mark your place and come back later. Well, whatever the case, what do you think about all this? Do you feel the distance between you and the things you touching right now? Has it hit you that you can never experience things as they really, truly are? That to do so, you would need to be a god, or at least a brainless pigeon?

Here, let's try this. I'll try not to get too morbid on you, but here we go. The Buddha once lamented, "What creature of a day should cling to other frail beings, when he can never again through thousands of births behold his beloved?" Even now, I think you can hear his voice crack just a little with sadness as he says that last part. If you drop your guard and let it crash in on you, the terrible finality of death is an awful thing. It means that the things that make you, you will be lost, and, perhaps more important, the love you had for others will hold no meaning.

I think in some ways the

partiality of experience is even worse. Death is orbiting some distant star out there, behind fog and dust, far from the matter of your daily life and mine, and if you're not Emily Dickinson you won't worry about it too much. But partiality of experience, limits and edges: these things are immanent. Quick! Did you know that in this very room that you are standing or sitting in at this moment, there is a tiny crack in the wall, just to your left, entirely visible to you, that you will never take the time to notice? The same goes for your favorite place, the one that is so familiar to you: you are incapable of seeing everything in it. You must organize it, divide what you see into objects, and focus only on some. Worse, someday, there will be a freckle, or maybe a wrinkle, on the face of your significant other that you in your haste will pass over and never see.

As if it weren't bad enough that there are books you will never read, thoughts you will

never think, and goals you will never attain! But at least we can appeal and say that it was the failure of our bodies which so limited and failed us. What I am suggesting is that in every moment, we limit ourselves: we hack up our experience, carve out the curves we want to see. We give things edges to make things a little easier for us to get by, but in doing so we murder the living moment and apportion terms to one thing or another for our comestibility and comprehension. We are pragmatic, directed towards our next goal, and in our haste we ignore most of what we find. We live a fractional life, piecemeal. We can't help it, because this space and time are built into us, but we are responsible just the same. And we miss out on so much.

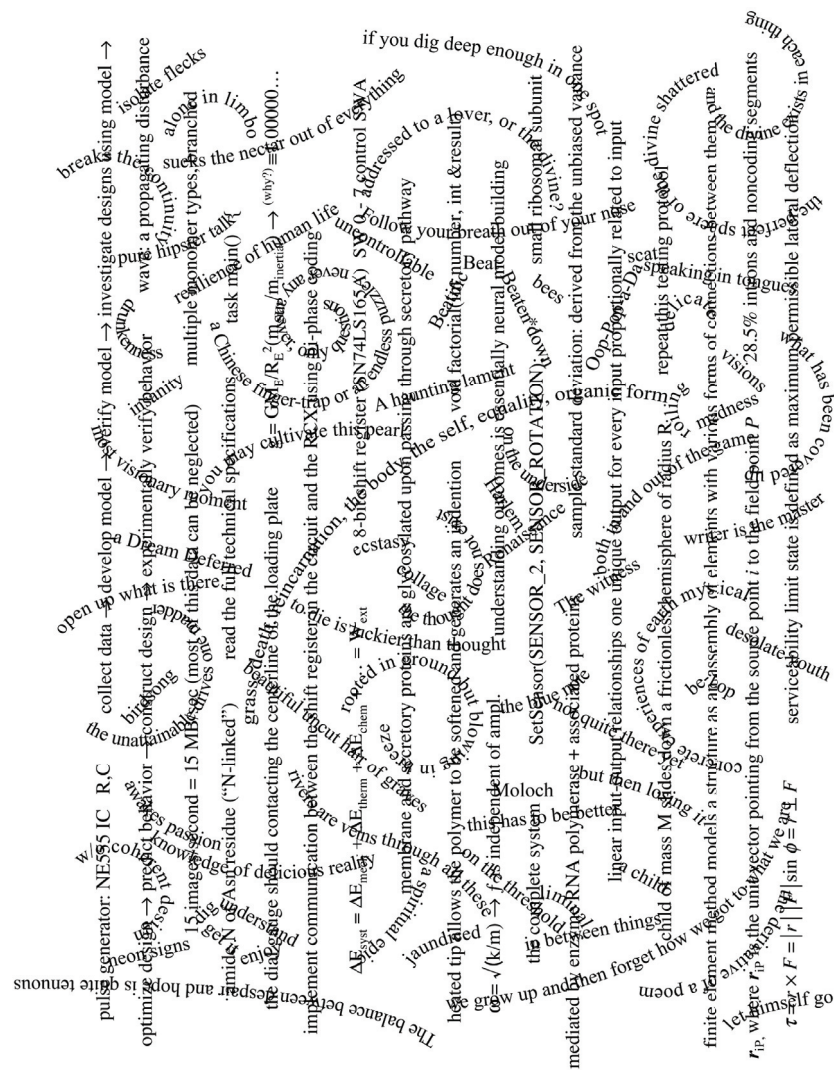
But (and here, finally, is my point): we wouldn't have anything without this. We feel pity for that brainless pigeon, who sees everything and yet nothing. In a similar way, to see beyond space and

interest, and that you will follow that path with thoughts of your own. ❧

If you have gained nothing from our conversation, then I apologize for my inconsiderate use of your time. It may be that what I've had to say here might be not be valuable for a lot of people. But if you have followed me this far, then it is my highest aspiration that somewhere along this discussion you will have noticed something that took your

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Josef Kuhn
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Reflections on the God Debate

An Essay

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Most artists, even amateur ones like myself, check themselves when they begin a project by considering what their audience wants. Whether it's debating, writing, cooking or painting, success in the field often begins with matching one's artistic creations to the dietary whims of popular opinion. But when it comes to the God Debate, I draw the line, because what the audience wants to hear is not what needs to be said. If I wanted to, I could scoop up some of the writings from my journal of political thoughts, sprinkle them with some sweeping pronouncements on cellular biology and priest scandals, heap them together into some cloudy shape like an overzealous street vendor peddling

some American corruption of gelato, and lob it to you with a false promise of sincerity. Hell, if I could convince this journal's readers to pay me, I might even call it an argument. Maybe if they whipped some of their points of disagreement into a frenzy of dripping rhetoric and plopped them onto a cone we could have a taste-testing contest. After all, that's about the level of sophistication of the God Debate – a celebration of appetite and opinionated posturing posing to everyone as a serious reflection on religion. And if it looks like an ice-cream cone and tastes like one too, it makes little difference to most if it's just frozen milk.

The God Debate was less of a debate and more of a spectacle meant to amplify the arguments of normal people and legitimize them – or worse yet, to convince viewers that these arguments should have

the final say. It was a focus on all of the particulars and none of what matters. It was an exercise in slight-of-hand. So Christopher Hitchens, for all his Marxist ancestry, branded the beast of organized religion with just enough incendiary slurs to disguise the fact that he is little more than a liberal utilitarian, albeit one fed up with the elevation of "tolerance" to the capstone of the virtue pyramid. And Dinesh D'Souza tucked away real argument and apologetics, rolled up his intellectual sleeves, and dug deep into the hat of scientific anomalies to pull out (tada!) God.

But this pulls the argument ahead of itself, for it was really only the heart of the debate that was imprecise and carelessly articulated. In the introductory statements Hitchens was entertaining and actually on-topic. Yes, his thoughts may have streamed out of his consciousness like a tired, old garland of popcorn being pulled out of a closet where it

was stuffed since last Christmas, but it is not as if the banner that he jabbed at D'Souza hadn't been recited before. This debate was a third not a first, which certainly boxes out creative ideas in favor of up-to-date facts, much like the sorry excuse for presidential debates that steals this country away from American Idol every four years. But at least in the opening remarks Hitchens hit on the pressing dilemma of the modern scene: skepticism. What does it mean to know something, to be certain? How certain can one even be given that we truly are, as Hitchens remarked "overborne by how little we know, and by how little we know about more and more"? Is skepticism the only rationally defensible position, not just for intellectuals, but for the average person? What relevance does a belief in God have to our decisions about our lives, our histories, and the future of the human race? And is organized religion a hindrance to the project

of discovering truth?

Christopher Hitchens certainly thinks so. I dare say he believes it with conviction, if the kind of ardent belief he espouses is compatible with the stern skepticism he endorses. These are the phantoms that rise to the surface of very real dilemmas, and they should, one would think, be at the core of the nuclear reactor that the God Debate was hyped-up to be. But of course they were not. In the first 10 or so minutes in which Christopher Hitchens made his case for the injustices of religion and explained its sociological roots is to be found the entirety of a cohesive thought on the relationship between religion, science, and justice. There is a clear and present danger in softening the deep wrinkles that divide different religious communities to present a single unpleasant face for them all. Combining the quagmire of problems between Israelis and Palestinians, at the center of which undeniably are

religions, with the recent worrisome growth of the Russian government, for which religion has been only a tool, is misleading at best. But this is the approach Hitchens took, and once he did so his work looked more like a caricature than a portrait.

Russia under Putin is alarming, whether he is head-of-state or “head-of-state”, but his Soviet rhetoric sounds a lot like, well, Soviet rhetoric. And as everyone including Hitchens knows, the Soviet Union was, as North Korea and China still are, avowedly atheist. But that has done nothing to prevent those countries’ leaders from distributing their own mythologies and plastering the sides of their buildings with their own faces and symbols and parading around in cult-like opulence while the masses gather rank and file, kneeling, bowing, saluting, and cheering at all the appropriate times. Secular, atheist, or religious, worship is powerful, and it is important not to confuse its

place in faith with its exploits in politics. It is also vital not to confuse worship with religion; Hitchens’ remarks were ripe with ideas on the former, but said very little on the latter. But to Hitchens, worship is a small catch, and religion is the big fish that wins the prize. And when most of the audience knows far too little about fishing to begin with, a little bragging goes a long way. Hitchens may have been onto something in viewing the totalitarianism of the 20th century as its own sort of religion, but Mussolini’s Italy was not Augustine’s “City of God”.

But the night went on, with Hitchens wielding all the news about violent religions much like a magician wields the linked-rings trick during a magic show: after seeing it once, no one is fooled, but with enough pomp and performance, the crowd willingly forgets. While entertaining and certainly well-placed, his sardonic quips about the role Christians and Muslims have

assumed in persecutions and acts of violence were blunt but not particularly convincing. Nor were the sweeping gestures with which he re-gifted the tales of European history. That France, England and Spain fought wars for which religion was a convenient impetus is clear; that removing religion would have halted the wars is not. In a quip of his own Bertolt Brecht once remarked that war, like love “always finds a way.”

But perhaps it is unfair to hold Hitchens solely accountable for the determination with which the debate ran away from its purpose. At least in these first remarks, however distracting and haughty, there was material, opinion, dialogue. For those in the audience who, like me, were under the impression that the God Debate would be a verbal fight having something to do with its tagline (“Is religion the problem?”), the rest of the event was more like a recurring infomercial. After such a caus-

tic and focused introduction, Hitchens never made good on his promises of demagoguery. But a good deal of the blame for the debate's boringness can be eased from Christopher Hitchens' shoulders, for there is one other person who seems to have articulated very well what his aim was before proceeding to completely ignore it, namely, Dinesh D'Souza.

D'Souza's robust introduction was what every educated theist should have hoped for; the sickly body of his argument was what they should have prayed against. No sooner had he opened his cookbook of pseudo-science and begun adding whatever spices he felt would burn the recipe for evolution than the whole argument lost its way. It is not just that D'Souza seemed intent on and proud of finding loopholes to substantiate his belief in God, but that his loopholes were frequently confused and, more often than not, beside the point. It makes no difference at all how "finely

tuned" the universe's natural laws are, if the margin of error is one one-million-millionth or one-half. The answer to the question 'Would humans exist if conditions were different?' is, by all indications, a resounding 'no.' To conclude from the fact that we do exist that God is actively responsible is to presuppose that we had to have existed, that there was no other way for the world to go. And that presupposition requires an argument of its own, rather than a confident assertion. Further, demonstrating that the cell could not have "evolved" because the word "cell" appears in the definition of "evolution" is a worse intellectual gimmick than Scientology. There are a number of explanations for the cell's origins from chemistry, physics, and biology that, though they do not constitute "evolution" *per se*, cannot be dismissed with a dictionary.

Catholics the campus over should be more than uneasy with Dinesh D'Souza as the

popular voice for religion. While he was certainly correct that he spent no time in arguing for the utility of faith, crowd members with a degree in the sciences should be shaking away the nervousness at the thought that he might have tried. The hackneyed case he dolled-up for the debate was everything that Christopher Hitchens promised it would be: intellectually unsatisfying, unfalsifiable, and deistic. It is a stance as easily strung up and snapped and as a Victorian criminal with no allegiance to the queen, and it goes a little something like this: science cannot explain everything about the physical world; there are gaps; God fills the gaps.

The problem with this argument is that it is built, not on quicksand, but on rather obvious irrelevancies. There have always been gaps in humanity's knowledge of the physical universe, and those gaps show no signs of plugging themselves. Any naturalist

who claims otherwise is either insincere or has never seriously reflected on the theoretical artistry of defining light as both a particle and a wave. At times it is a wonder apologists like D'Souza do not raise the same banner: God both exists and he doesn't! At the same time! But the real danger is that to commit oneself to a belief in a God whose purpose and source is in the filling-in of gaps in our knowledge of the physical universe is to affirm a belief in a deity whose identity is constantly changing, not because it is so immense, but because it is perpetually shrinking, increasingly irrelevant, and constantly on the defensive.

D'Souza was certainly right to call the work of many modern intellectuals "acrobatics", but he was wrong to associate that work only with atheists. As the welder of the links in the scientific chain, the God D'Souza offered was meek; it would take a good deal of what Hitchens would probably

call theological acrobatics to give Catholics even a sparring chance in the contemporary arenas of debate. D'Souza's variation on the "God of the gaps" theme was not at all a divine being who: is intimately involved in his flock's lives; has made it virtuous to worship and praise him; or cares, to use Hitchens' words, "with whom we sleep, and in what position."

This critique perhaps pushes too far, for the engagement D'Souza claimed was one of apologetics, not of persuasion. His task was not to convince the audience to convert to Catholicism, but instead to show that belief in God is not foolish; it is a central tenet of Catholicism that while God's existence and certain attributes may be known by reason, many core particulars are available only by revelation. But even with this in mind, D'Souza was only sleepily convincing, offering the kind of advice that seems gripping only on a Friday night when

the bars have closed. And it was somewhat of a shock to those paying close attention that Dinesh D'Souza chose to mention David Hume (loosely, but by name) in his defense, seeing as Hume was a very sincere critic of religious belief and at least an agnostic, but also perhaps the grandfather of the intellectual movement that birthed Christopher Hitchens. The first retort Hume would likely have whipped back at D'Souza's project is that it fails on its own terms: if God is the he-who-fills-in-the-gaps, then the power he wields need be only as strong as necessary, and no stronger. While D'Souza previews his God as Hume's sufficient cause, he presents him as nothing of the sort; it also worth asking, as Hitchens wishes to, whether D'Souza has hopscotched to God when a simple step elsewhere would have sufficed.

The final lash against D'Souza's work was that he, like Hitchens, never made due on the promises of discussing

God's relevance and role in the lives of people, choosing instead to chisel away at the stone and fashion God into existence. But for a discourse with as much as solidity and fact-checking as the God Debate, it is important to ask what sort of intellectual agreements were reached before the match even began. And it is here, in the unspoken assumptions held by both Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza, that the real problem rests. For what D'Souza and Hitchens share is the conviction that, if the sciences were able to provide a complete framework for understanding the physical world, then the idea of God would become archaic, unnecessary, and childish; where they disagree is merely on the capabilities of the sciences, with Hitchens the voice for throwing off religions' chains and D'Souza his timid interlocutor.

This is the greatest danger for Catholic intellectuals, to see themselves and their faith

clinging to a snowy peak praying that the avalanche of evolution does not finally fall, swearing nervously by science's inadequacies that the ground is solid, as if to convince themselves by force. Serious theists would do well to revive an interest in biology, chemistry and physics, and to reject the engagement with those disciplines put forth by Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza. Part of what we have to learn from Aristotle, and from St. Thomas Aquinas and the Venerable John Henry Newman after him, is that to see the world as a Catholic is to see each level of it blossoming from the level below – to see the universe as structured, so that the physical provides the raw material for the chemical, the chemical for the biological, and the biological for the human, and so on.

The sciences will never be without some gaps, but what is important is the realization that if they ever could be, then they would join the humani-

ties, the arts, the social sciences, and all else in elucidating the most complete picture of God there could ever be. The longer theists like Dinesh D'Souza continue to miss the point and the issue, the more religious belief looks like an irrational, ill-informed, poor life decision. The God Debate was little more than a glorified, broken promise, and while there is much to be learned from it, it offers little in the way of teaching. ❀

Fledgling's Canon

A Poem

Kathleen Shircliff,
Class of 2011
Program of Liberal Studies

We let Icarus plummet to the sea -
A man is just a man, condemned to die;
As human being, human you must be:
You fight, flail, fall, but never will you fly.
Trudge toward the heights, Mortality demands,
Then watch your stone roll down, dusk smother day
'Til life is shadow, slipping from your hands -
Must sun-scorched wings and dark depths be our way?
Arise, for you are only dust in part!
Though you remain a spark beneath the sky,
Stand tall, outstretched your smooth, strong arms and heart
And you can will it possible to fly.
The middle route need not be paved with strife
If you can live to love and love your life.

Don't Trim the Trees

A Story

Tim LaBarge
Class of 2010
Free Agent

"You know what I don't like? I'll tell you. Picnics. My wife and I went on a picnic one time. Things started okay, and we were enjoying ourselves. The food was good and the weather was tolerable. But then after a little bit the ants came along. They got all over our legs and inside all of our food. Everyone knows that the ants don't ever stop. It didn't matter how many times we shoved them off or moved our food. The ants found it. It wasn't worth it to me. No way. My wife said, 'Ray just ignore the ants, will you?' By the time the picnic ended we realized that we could have had a better time altogether had we eaten practically anywhere else. We noticed when we picked up the blanket that we had picnicked

right on top of an anthill."

Everyone in Pokers Canyon knew that Ray Parker at times was a bitter man. He was in his sixties, now. They all knew that he had long since decided to make himself an outcast. They also knew that he didn't "make the most of life" and they certainly never said he was one to "find the silver lining." It mattered little how many words one spoke with him, and more how many words one spoke with their neighbor. Yes, the whole town knew the essence of Ray Parker, inside and out. Of course, everyone had his or her own view on the matter.

Women referred to him as angry and untrustworthy, shielding children from him.

"He's a menace. He's terrible," they said. "I don't want to be near him, I don't want my child going near him. Quite frankly I don't want anyone going near him. He'll pollute

your mind if you talk about him for too long."

Men viewed him as cynical at times, but usually down to earth albeit a tad serious.

"I wouldn't say I like Ray Parker, and I wouldn't call him my friend," most of them said. "But from time to time it takes someone like Ray to see things in this world for what they are. No, I don't wish ill upon him, nor any man for that matter. But if I were to wish ill upon any one man, that one man would not be Ray Parker."

The older generation was split more evenly than most groups, but a small majority thought he was a bit "off his rocker" and possibly dangerous.

"He's a bit of a hooligan, I'd say. He seems nice enough when I see him at church, but I wouldn't want to marry my daughter off to him, that's for sure. Every man has a history as far as I'm concerned and Ray Parker's isn't a good one, you hear me on that."

Lastly, there were the teens.

The teens thought his mystique was cool, but were usually a bit more concerned with their own hormones to notice anything of interest about him.

"Ray Parker? Yeah he's alright," they said. "Like, he can be cool sometimes, but other times he gets kinda weird ya know? I don't really see what all the fuss is about personally, but I guess people gotta talk about something."

So, this all being said, it came as much of a surprise to the residents of Pokers Canyon when they heard that little Benji Johnson, who was no more than eight years old at the time, wandered his way up Ray Parker's driveway on a sunny Sunday afternoon. He was a scrawny boy who made a habit of tearing holes in his clothes, but always managed to win his mother over with an innocent smile.

"Hi Mr. Ray," Benji said with a smile. Ray Parker was outside his brown, one story house trimming his bushes.

He wore khaki pants and a white shirt.

"Who're you?" Ray asked.

"My name's Benji. I live around the corner by the bend in the river."

"Okay," Ray said.

"Are you cutting down trees? Can I help?" Benji asked.

"No. Just trimmin' bushes," Ray said.

"Oh wow! Can I help?"

"No, I don't think so," Ray said.

Ray Parker hacked away at a few branches while Benji watched him, quietly picking at his fingernails.

"Why don't you cut down a tree instead? That seems like more fun," Benji said.

"Don't need to cut down a tree. It's too big anyhow. Just gotta do a little bit at a time," Ray said.

"Well alright. Do you want to play when you're done?" Benji asked.

"I don't think so," Ray said.

"Why are you doing that anyway?" Benji asked.

Ray didn't answer.

"Is it like getting a haircut? At least you don't have to pay for it. How do you know how to do this? Did someone teach you? Did your dad teach you? My dad usually pays for people to cut our bushes. He says they need to do it so they can buy food. Do you have food?"

"Does your mother know you're here?" Ray asked.

Benji looked at his bare feet before answering. "Yes. Well, no. I don't think so. She said I shouldn't come around here."

"Hm." Ray continued studying the bushes.

Benji looked unsure of what to say next, so he waited for Ray to continue trimming his bushes.

"Why'd you come here then?" Ray asked.

"I don't know," Benji said.

"I thought you looked pretty neat."

"Hm."

"Well your bushes sure do look nice Mr. Ray." Benji scampered off down the sidewalk, back around the bend in the river.

"Thanks, Benji," Ray said. The child was out of earshot, but Ray watched him until he disappeared behind a row of trees. A hint of a smile crept to the corners of his mouth.

The following Sunday, Ray Parker watched from his living room chair as Benji Johnson walked briskly up the sidewalk and turned in at his driveway. He scurried his way up the path to Ray's front door and rang the doorbell. When Ray didn't answer right away he peered his head in the windows. "Hi Mr. Ray! I see you through the window! Can you come open the door?" Ray sighed heavily and rose from his chair. He unlatched the door and turned around to return to his chair. Benji sped his way around him and beat him to the living room.

"Neat house!" he exclaimed. "Hey we have one of those in our house!" he said pointing to a crucifix on the wall. "Do you go to church too Mr. Ray?"

"On Sundays, I do," Ray said.

"I think church is boring."

"Hm."

"Do you think church is boring Mr. Ray?" Benji asked.

"No," Ray said.

"Why not?" Benji asked.

"Church is important," Ray said.

"Why?"

Ray Parker was silent. He eyed the child for a moment curiously. "Your mother know you're here?" he asked.

"Um, not really," Benji said. Before Ray could say anything else Benji was peering into the kitchen. "Wow your kitchen is really clean, Mr. Ray. Does someone clean it for you?"

"No, I clean it myself," Ray said.

"Oh. Someone comes and cleans our house sometimes. Her name is Mrs. Gumpert. I think she smells funny. Mom tells me not to say that, though," Benji said.

"Imagine that," Ray said.

"Your house is kinda dark, Mr. Ray. You should turn on more lights. Why are your walls such a dark color?"

"They're wood," Ray said.
 "That's weird. The walls in our house are all white. I think we have more lights, too. Don't you want more lights?"
 "No," Ray said.
 "How come?" Benji asked.
 "Don't need 'em," Ray said.
 "How old are you Mr. Ray?" Benji asked, disappearing behind a wall as he took a few steps up the stairs.
 "Does your mother shush you when you ask people that, too?" Ray said.
 "I don't know," Benji said, poking his head out from around the wall. "What's up here?"
 "My bedroom," Ray said.
 "Wow! Can I see?" Benji asked.
 "Not today," Ray said.
 Benji came down from the stairs and sat on a small sofa next to Ray. There was an old television set in front of them, but it was off. Thick dust had long been collecting on its screen. Benji rocked back and forth, bouncing himself off of the pillows on the sofa.

"What do you want to do now?" Benji asked.
 "Nothing."
 Benji sat blankly on the couch for a moment, silent at last.
 "I wasn't sure your mouth knew how to stop," Ray said.
 Benji laughed nervously, looking at his dirty toes sticking out of his sandals.
 "I'm sixty-three," Ray said. "I don't have more lights because I don't like to waste electricity. I like my wooden walls, and I will not make them white. I think church is important because it's a way for people to connect through faith and forgiveness. And I keep my kitchen clean because I think a dirty kitchen sends a bad message about a person."
 "What do you mean?" Benji asked.
 "Well you know, a dirty kitchen equals a dirty person. It could mean they're lazy, angry, unorganized. A clean kitchen means a clean person. It means they're responsible, and caring. They value life."

"You know all that because of a kitchen?" Benji's face looked confused.
 "Well it's a sort of metaphor," Ray said.
 "What's a metaphor?" Benji asked.
 Ray smiled. "It's like a symbol for something else."
 "Okay. Well, my mom is thirty-six. How much older are you than her?" Benji asked.
 "Don't you know how to subtract?" Ray said.
 "Yeah, but I don't like to do it on the weekends," Benji said.
 Ray reached over to the end table next to his chair and grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil. "Here you go," he said. "Work it out, and then you tell me."
 Benji reluctantly grabbed the paper and pencil and knelt down by the coffee table. Ray watched him as he borrowed and subtracted.
 "Twenty-seven?" Benji asked looking up.
 Ray nodded.
 Benji smiled. Ray got him a glass of lemonade before usher-

ing him to the door.
 The next Sunday, Benji strolled up Ray Parker's front walk once again. Pokers Canyon was abuzz with talks, some innocent and others not so kind. The optimistic folks proclaimed that Ray Parker had finally reached out and welcomed friendship in to his life once again. They hoped for the best for him. The pessimists knew that something was awry, and were simply waiting for the stories about Ray Parker to hit the newspaper. Perhaps a court date would accompany them. They hoped for the worst and scanned the headlines each day.
 Meanwhile, Ray sat on his porch idly sipping iced tea. He watched the cars roll around the corner. Every once in awhile he tried to catch the eye of the driver to wave, but most people avoided looking towards him unless it was a sideways glance, often accompanied by a whisper.
 "Hi Mr. Ray," Benji said

happily. "What's that?" he asked pointing to his glass.
 "That's iced tea."
 "Gross," Benji said.
 "Does your mother know you're here, Benji?" Ray asked.
 Benji gave a nervous laugh before taking a seat on the porch chair next to Ray. He swung his legs carelessly.
 "You can have some zucchini bread if you want," Ray said indicating a slice on the plate next to Benji's chair. Another half-eaten piece rested on the plate next to it.
 "It looks weird, but alright," Benji said. "Are you all done with your bushes, Mr. Ray?" he asked.
 "Yes," Ray said.
 "Neat, what are we gonna do today?" Benji asked.
 "Nothing," Ray said.
 "Do you want to trim the trees now?" Benji asked.
 "No," Ray said.
 "Why not?" Benji asked.
 "Because we don't need to," Ray said.
 "Well do you want to plant some trees then?" Benji asked.

"Not today, Benji," Ray said.
 Benji leaned back and slumped his shoulders. "Mr. Ray, what's an adulter?"
 Ray choked on his swig of iced tea. He spat a portion of it out on the porch floor, and then slowly wiped the liquid from his chin. "What did you say? What's a what?"
 "An adulter," Benji repeated.
 "Are you trying to say 'adulterer'?" Ray asked.
 "Yeah! What's that?" Benji asked.
 "I think it's about time you went home, Benji."
 "But I just got here!" Benji protested.
 "Well I think we should talk about something else then," Ray said.
 "Do you like baseball?" Benji asked.
 "Do you ever run out of questions?" Ray said.
 "No."
 "Of course not. Yes I like baseball."
 "Which team?" Benji asked.
 "The Reds."
 "Where are they from?"

"Cincinnati."
 "Are they good?" Benji asked.
 "Unfortunately, not lately. In fact they've been terrible. They used to be great, though," Ray said.
 "Then why do you like them?" Benji asked.
 "Because I've always liked them. Through all the ups and downs. No matter how good or bad."
 "Are they bad people?" Benji asked.
 "The Cincinnati Reds?" Ray said.
 "No. Adulterers," Benji said.
 Ray sighed. "Yes, they're bad people."
 "Do you know any?" Benji asked.
 "Yes, unfortunately I do," Ray said.
 Benji was quiet for a second. "What are they like?" he asked.
 "They're just like anyone else," Ray said. "Except they do bad things."
 "What kinds of bad things, Mr. Ray?" Benji asked.

"That's enough I think, Benji. You need to run on home before your mother gets worried."
 "Oh alright. But don't worry Mr. Ray, I told my mom you weren't one," Benji said before running down Ray's driveway.
 "Hm."
 The next Sunday Ray didn't see Benji Johnson. Come mid-afternoon he found himself peaking out the window every so often. He had become accustomed to the child's visits on Sunday afternoons, despite the reaction of the rest of the Pokers Canyon. He knew that people were talking, but then again they had been talking for the better part of forty years.
 "Some things never stop, Lucy," Ray said, looking to a picture on his nightstand. "And one of those things is the rumor mill of a small town." Ray made his way back downstairs and leaned his head back in his recliner.
 It was the following Sunday when Ray was outside prun-

ing flowers that he saw Benji again.

"Hey Mr. Ray!" Benji said jumping on to Ray's porch.

"Hi there, Benji," Ray said.

"Can I ask you a question?" Benji asked.

"You've never asked permission before," Ray said.

"How come there's a picture of my mom on that table by your bed?"

Ray stopped pruning and looked up at Benji who was standing over the railing porch looking down on him innocently. "When did you see that?"

"I came over last Sunday but you were asleep. I stayed for a little but you never woke up," Benji said.

"And you went upstairs to my bedroom?" Ray said.

Benji looked at his feet. "Yes, but..." and he trailed off.

Ray pruned a few more flowers. "That wasn't your mother. It was my wife," he said.

"Your wife?" Benji asked.

"Yes, my wife," Ray said.

"Well where is she now?" Benji asked. "How come I

never see her?"

"She died."

"Oh," Benji said quietly.

"How'd she die?" he asked.

"She was sick," Ray said.

"Sick with what?" Benji asked.

Ray stood up slowly. He had a few wrinkles around his eyes, and a few more around his mouth. He studied Benji and spoke heavily. "They didn't know," he answered. "The doctors couldn't find anything wrong."

"So she died from nothing?" Benji asked.

"From a broken heart," Ray said, bending over again and returning to the flowers.

"What do you mean?"

Benji asked. "What broke her heart?"

"Well, Benji," Ray started, "there are few things more painful in this world than losing a family member. Especially when that family member is still alive. Hopefully you never have to learn that. But I think in the end she felt betrayed."

Benji fidgeted with his fingers. "Did you betray her, Mr.

Ray?"

Ray didn't speak for a minute. He looked up at Benji again. "No, Benji, I didn't."

"I knew you didn't," Benji said, smiling. "What was your wife's name?"

"Lucy," Ray said.

"Oh. My mom's name is Barbara. You know what, Mr. Ray?"

"What Benji?"

"Your wife looks an awful lot like my mom."

"Yes she does, Benji."

Life went on as usual in Pokers Canyon. Those who held their opinions about Ray Parker kept those opinions, for better or worse. However, there was one thing that changed in the town following Benji's visits. Now and then there was a car that would drive around the bend in the river and pull in to Ray Parker's driveway on Sunday afternoons. A family would hop out and make their way up to his front porch. Benji Johnson would usually lead the way, bounding his way up the stairs and to the front door. Of course, the

town was abuzz with talks.

"You know what I love doing? I'll tell you. Sitting under a big tree in the springtime, preferably a willow. It's by a river, and you can hear the water running. And then I love picking up a book and just diving in to it, giving myself to it completely. The ground is soft and comfortable. The summer drought hasn't come yet. Meanwhile, the willow doesn't judge. It just covers you up, and lets you do as you please. You can get lost in another world completely, one that doesn't know you. And all the while you can sit under that tree and it'll protect you. If you get too hot, the river is there and you can go throw some water on your face. You can look in to the water and see your reflection. There are rocks underneath and some bubbles on top, but in the end all you see staring back at you is yourself. And then that water runs by, but all the while you see the same face. It's a beautiful thing. Then you can get back to your book." ❁

On Incomprehensibility

An Essay

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I can't imagine any better way to start an essay on philosophical incoherence than with a quote from the famous German philosopher Martin Heidegger: "The not does not originate through negation; rather, negation is grounded in the not that springs from the nihilation of the nothing" (105).

The above quote really has nothing to do with the main topic of this paper. Many philosophers (myself included) would argue that it has nothing to do with anything, but we'll get to that later. What the quote does provide is a shining example of a phenomenon that every student of philosophy is doomed to grapple with time and again:

a philosophical claim that, to put it bluntly, makes absolutely no sense.

This phenomenon is hardly unique to philosophy; in fact, every field of study inevitably presents its students with material that they have trouble understanding, but in almost every case, it's easy to know how to deal with it. If an English student complains that a certain poem by T.S. Eliot "doesn't make sense," he is missing the point. If a physics student complains that a certain mathematical formula doesn't make sense, he should go back and read the chapter he skipped. Note that these two examples represent opposite ends of the phenomenon. The arts deal with subjective concepts that aren't intended to "make sense"; the sciences deal with concrete, objective concepts that anyone of sufficient mental capabilities

should be able to make sense of if they put in enough effort.

But philosophy occupies a very unique and precarious position. Either because they lies somewhere in the shady middle between the objective and subjective studies or because their object of study is so far abstracted from both of them, impenetrable philosophical statements are much harder to deal with. Though they often deal with subjective ideas and concepts, it is never permissible to dismiss a philosophical statement the way one might dismiss a poem or even a novel as "not intended to make sense." But at the same time, philosophy is not so mathematically precise and objective that we can be sure that every time something fails to make sense, it's only a function of how much work one puts into trying to understand it. This may not seem so terrible at first glance, but the very distressing consequence of all this is that the phrase "This makes no sense" might actually be

a valid objection sometimes when applied to philosophy.

Here we come to what is probably the most neglected problem in the study of philosophy: how to distinguish between sense and nonsense in philosophic discourse. My experience has shown that the default approach in teaching philosophy is to assume that every philosophical text has an underlying coherent thesis that it is advocating, no matter how dense, obscure or impenetrable it might be. Conflicting interpretations are always accepted, of course, but only very seasoned professionals are ever allowed to write a text off as incoherent.

It may be perfectly reasonable not to allow students such an easy way out as dismissing what they read as nonsense, but for anyone who's ever been subjected to examination of a tract by Heidegger which uses nouns as verbs and employs a new non-existent German word on almost every page, it's quite agonizing to know

beyond any doubt that what you're reading is gibberish but not be able to say so or explain why. But is there really no way to diagnose incomprehensibility in philosophy?

Many methods have been put forward, but as with anything in philosophy, none of them are unanimously accepted, and whether one accepts them or not depends heavily on one's personal philosophical views. In fact, this very issue can be seen as an expression of what has been for more than a hundred years probably the biggest divide in contemporary philosophy: the split between the Continental and Analytic philosophical traditions. As the name suggests, Continental philosophy was centered in continental Europe and included such prominent figures as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the dominant trend that came from Anglo-American philosophers is generally referred to as Analytic philosophy.

While the Continental philosophers felt free to delve into the mystical realm of metaphysics, human subjectivity and all those other obscure topics that philosophy has generally been known for, the Analytic philosophers were much more concerned with the limits of philosophy and of human knowledge in general. They often criticized their Continental peers for delving into concepts that were so opaque as to be incomprehensible. In other words, they tried to make sense of ideas that are simply beyond comprehension.

But their criticism amounted to more than just "We can't understand what you're saying." The basic project of Analytic philosophy was a thorough analysis of the logic of language and the formulation of strict rules for what constitutes proper use of language. With this formulation in hand, they undertook an ambitious campaign to prove the major ideas in Continental

philosophy not only wrong, but incoherent.

One of the best examples of this sort of attack is Rudolf Carnap's aptly titled essay, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language." The essay not only details Carnap's theory of language and philosophical coherence, but even provides a direct attack on the lecture from Herr Heidegger that I quoted at the beginning of this essay. His criteria for linguistic coherence are very straightforward. Carnap stipulates that, for a sentence to be coherent, it must follow both grammatical and logical syntax (68). Grammatical coherence is easy enough to understand (We can all plainly see that "Parachute ableistic contralto Djugashvilli of," is not a coherent sentence), but this isn't enough for Carnap; the words of a sentence must all logically fit together. Consider the sentence "Ice cream is a prime number." This sentence makes perfect syntacti-

cal sense, consisting of a noun subject followed by a linking verb, followed by a predicate nominative, but it still fails to make coherent sense because it asserts of its subject something that can only be asserted of numbers. The subject, we can all agree, is not a number. Carnap then applies this system to Heidegger's claim. In this case, he attacks Heidegger at such a basic level that he doesn't have to struggle to understand what sort of deep subjective human experience Heidegger is trying to elucidate. He just has to point out that the word "nothing" is grammatically a noun but doesn't actually refer to an object, so treating it like an object makes no sense, Heidegger fails, and the game is over. What is the conclusion of all this? Carnap is too much of a professional to say it but I'm not: the conclusion is that Heidegger's philosophy is total crap!

The ease with which this method allows us to trash huge swaths of highbrow philobab-

ble in one fell swoop, without even bothering to try and figure out what the hell these Germans are talking about, is indeed very appealing, but unfortunately, Carnap's simplistic linguistic method is neither universally accepted (even by Analytic philosophers) nor without its consequences. I won't go into the debate surrounding this whole notion of linguistic coherence, but consider what accepting a position like Carnap's could mean for philosophy. Carnap was one of the foremost proponents of a philosophy known as logical positivism, which states that scientific knowledge is the only knowledge people can have. As the name clearly implies, "The Elimination of Metaphysics" was an essay devoted to trashing not only extremists like Heidegger, but all metaphysical thought whatsoever, any system claiming to give knowledge about "ultimate reality," about ethics, about our emotions and our

inner lives, about anything at all but the facts of science. Carnap agrees, of course, that these are all important aspects of human existence, but since nothing about them can be empirically demonstrated, there is no knowledge to be had about them. If this is true, it means the philosopher's only job is picking apart words and explaining exactly why all this talk about "the nihilation of the nothing" doesn't make any sense, not to give us new knowledge about anything. So if you want to talk about love or ultimate truth or the meaning of life, write tragic poetry about it; don't waste our time with an incomprehensible "philosophical" tract about it.

This is a hard position to accept, despite its many advantages and the way it simplifies so much of what goes on in not only philosophy, but any field of study. I have few qualms about committing Heidegger to the flames, but converting me to logical

positivism will require a bit more convincing. Philosophy should know its limits, but to consign all our knowledge to the positions and momenta of particles? That's going a bit too far. ❀

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The Eleventh Floor

A Poem

Anna O'Meara
Class of 2012
Tea

The world opens its mouth to scream and I complete the kiss as much as I am able.
Books like rotten heirlooms burrow in the phantasmagoria of space-time.
A photograph. I move my finger across the dead body of a woman.
This ivory tower is constructed of bones;
Catholicism is constructed of flesh;
I am constructed of stars
and so are black holes.

Design and Globalization

How Graphic Design Can Inspire Global Culture

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In order to better understand our society, we must first understand ourselves. Indeed, society has already developed a thorough understanding of what affects us: society understands our emotions, motivation, decision making, and designers and marketers have been using this understanding to tailor their campaigns to each class of person. We inform designers. Designers shape our environment in the media they generate. Our environment in turn affects our decisions. Understanding the cyclical nature of our interaction with our culture, we then realize that we have a profound effect on the way our culture progresses and we can, by extension, have a say in

where it goes.

This paper contains four major points of discussion that revolve around the idea that graphic design in mass communication can inspire a global culture, and even perhaps one informed by Christianity. First, I argue that the environment in which people consistently find themselves will over time influence and affect the interior dispositions of the person, and when this occurs in great numbers, the culture. I argue for the importance of graphic design as a vital component in the development of culture and how as visual beings, we are affected by what we see. In the third place, I offer my interpretation of events in recent history related to graphic design that have changed our society and affected many people. Finally, I suggest a solution to the problem, citing early Christian

culture and placing it as the model for a positive change. Only with naturalness did the ordinary Christians of the early Church convert their society while being in the midst of it, and analogously, only with naturalness can we, the ordinary citizens in our popular culture, change our world.

To understand the culture of a particular people, it is often said that a study of language, history, music and more is required. By themselves, these elements of culture mean little; it is the effect of these characteristics on individuals at a macro level that brings about changes in culture. Our interior dispositions affect the way we make decisions and in turn affect the way our society characterizes itself in culture. It follows then that at the foundation of culture is the personal perception of the world in the common experience of many. This recognition that similarities in peoples build cultures was prevalent in the unification of the states

on the European continent in the late 19th Century and continues to hold true today [Hobsbawm, 1996]. Only when these perceptions are consistent through great numbers of a particular people can one make the generalization that such elements of society form the culture of the people.

Our view of ourselves and our society is based in large measure by our perception of our own world. In analyzing these individual elements of culture, language, history, music and the like, we notice that together, they create an environment for the audience. Individually, they seek to communicate ideas and emotions that in turn affect opinions and dispositions. These are all the result of communication, which, citing technology, have been reintroduced in the world of today in a new form of mass communication.

The rate at which these ideas can be communicated is directly proportional to the rate at which culture and societies

change and evolve. With the invention of the printing press in the 15th Century and the refinement of mass reproduction in the 18th Century, the cityscapes of countries like Great Britain were forever changed. A modern example of the cacophony of posters and advertisements can be observed in New York's Times Square or Japan's Shinjuku Ward in Tokyo. With the rapid dissemination of ideas come rapid changes in culture. With the printing press, Martin Luther was able to communicate his revolutionary ideas with such efficiency that it is arguable that the Protestant Reformation could not have been as successful were it not for the efficient reproduction technologies that would allow him to communicate his ideas. Copies of his 95 Theses spread throughout Europe within the year. The communication of ideas changes environments and attitudes and ultimately, culture.

As a main component of

popular culture, visuals in an environment affect the way individuals think. In the age of technology, design has come to have a profound effect on culture at large. This includes two and three dimensional work that seeks to communicate ideas or facts to large numbers of people and often occurs after thorough research of the designer's audience. People are affected by their environment; designers shape much of the visual environment; because of this, designers have a large affect on people and therefore a great effect on culture. Recognizing that environments affect the individual, world renowned novelist CS Lewis asserted that the environment that is created by a Christian affects him profoundly and is the reason that posture and incense have been widely used to create an environment conducive to prayer [Lewis, 1942].

Other than nature and accidents, everything that exists appears as it is because a person decided that it should look

this way, and to Christians, nature too is the conscious work of a mind [Sedlack, 2008]. In his book, *Glimmer: How Design Can Transform Your Life and Maybe Even the World* journalist Warren Berger states that “design is applicable to just about any challenge ... and its principles are accessible to anyone.” He continues to say that all while design will not solve major problems in “one fell swoop,” it is a new type of problem solving, it is creative problem solving and on a case by case basis, seeks to “learn what people are lacking in their lives” and to fill that void. By his observation, “the brain is always looking to figure out what’s important...but doesn’t know where to look or where to stop and focus.” Berger asserts that because “the power of visuals is much stronger,” in terms of affecting thought processes, designers research and capitalize on our visual and emotional nature to “get you to focus where you’re supposed

to focus.” With such power, designers carry in their hands a great responsibility to affect positive cultural change.

Design, specifically graphic design as a main engine of advertisement and marketing, is a crucial part of culture. Branding expert Marc Gobé goes as far as to say that marketing and popular culture are now coterminous. Observations of human interaction with design reveals concrete manifestations of this concept and the five examples in the coming paragraphs have been chosen because of their clear demonstration of the influence of design on culture.

Design affects the way people think; upon seeing the Coca-Cola logo, many people automatically think of the words “refreshing,” “delicious.” A 2009 study by Gadiah Mada University in India found that the most popular word associated with Coke is “thanda,” meaning “preferred,” and even in some dialects, “love.” This trend is not representative of

Coca-Cola alone: there is a worldwide association of the Adidas logo with ideas of “high quality” goods or people of “affluence.” Design evokes emotion and emotion affects decision making.

To capitalize on this growing trend of emotional association, the focus of designers has, in recent years, evolved from functionality to aesthetics and now to emotion. This is readily seen in the recent American presidential campaign between John McCain and Barack Obama. Upon seeing McCain campaign posters, many people saw a traditional old style, typical five pointed star and large letters on a white and blue poster. The opposing presidential candidate Barack Obama was one of the first to have his own logo. As a result of the campaign, many young Americans associate the Obama logo with the word “Change,” one of the most carefully chosen and communicated words of the Obama Presidential Campaign in

2008. Many also associate the Obama Presidential Campaign with the word “Hope” as depicted in the famous poster by graphic designer, Shepard Fairey, a clear example of the strong affect that design has on the person in the associations between concepts and emotions and ideas.

As a result of declining moral practices in the American motion picture industry, Archbishop of Cincinnati (1925-1950) John McNicholas (1877-1950) instituted the Catholic Legion of Decency in 1933. The Legion was charged with the task of watching and rating Hollywood movies, thereby empowering parents to make informed decisions about what their families were exposed to. Within one year, the legion had participants in over 80 dioceses and dealt a measurable blow to box offices, prompting two Hollywood representatives to meet Archbishop McNicholas on his doorstep to request a meeting [Fortin, 2007]. This

gave rise to the current Motion Picture Association of America Film Rating System. “McNicholas’ action against Hollywood stemmed largely from his concern over the morality of children and the powerful effect movies had on them” [Fortin, 2007]. Under the New York Education Law, some of the films condemned by the Catholic Legion of Decency were censored. This was the beginning of the end for the Catholic Legion of Decency with Supreme Court decision *Joseph Burstyn, Inc v. Wilson* which ruled that motion pictures would be considered protected under the First Amendment Right to ‘Freedom of Speech.’ [TIME Magazine, 1934]. Because of the legislation against the New York Education Law, the Catholic Legion of Decency lost its effectiveness. An attempt by clergy to revive the Legion in the 1960’s proved futile, and it now exists only as a branch of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

With the effect of the availability heuristic, repeated exposure to ideas and concepts increases the presence of that idea or concept in the receiver’s mind, and increases the possibility that it would affect decision making. A measurable example can be taken from the American motion picture industry. The movie *Animal House* [1978] depicted a less disciplined college culture that has largely shaped the way that the culture of American higher education has developed in recent decades. In contrast to the discipline and professionalism of the college culture prior to the American sexual revolution of the 1960’s, the modern college culture is largely similar to that depicted in *Animal House*, an exaggerated scene of excessive drinking and partying. The movie was so successful in the changes that it depicted and wrought that it was named one of the top films ever made by *Esquire Magazine*, and *The New York Times*, and was deemed “cul-

turally significant” and entered into the American National Film Registry. The ideas of this media became the norm in college life and further promote the change in culture.

The effect of design is seen in other examples within modern popular culture. The idea of living an environmentally sustainable lifestyle has existed for decades, and was alluded to in Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* [1891] and later cited in John Paul II’s *Centesimus-Annus* [1991] in which he criticized man’s tendency to “consume the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way.” And yet, not until Al Gore’s movie, *Inconvenient Truth* [2006] did graphic designers join the movement and help to create a worldwide phenomenon, creating signs and designing around grassroots movements that sparked political change. The introduction of designers to the movement, starting with the movie, was the genesis

of the modern sustainability movement.

In his book, *The World is Flat* [2005], Thomas Friedman explains that the globalized world is possible because of the ability to communicate on demand, allowing manufacturing to be outsourced and trade to take place efficiently worldwide [Friedman, 2005]. Many new social media have taken root because of the new opportunities in our connected and flattened world. Ideas spread with greater speed around the world as users engage in domestic and international video chats in real time and share photos on Facebook and Picasa. Design communicates ideas; globalization allows the communication of ideas to occur worldwide.

CS Lewis stated that in the sexual revolution of the 1960’s, many Americans called for the greater acceptance of sexual topics in popular culture. They claimed that once the initial lack of familiarity died down, the topic would become less

intriguing and would bring about the reduction of sexual crimes. Lewis asserts that this premise has been adopted for the past four decades, but rather than being free, the human race suffers from a higher instance of sexual crimes that cannot alone be attributed to a higher occurrence in reports to authority. In this conclusion, he recognizes the affect that the less regulated environment has had on society.

The early Christians lived in the middle of a world that sought their demise. It was through their ordinary friendships and naturalness that they changed Roman society from one which sought to exterminate them to one which embraced their way of life. In the same way, through Christian friendships, society can change itself from within.

Citing the observations of the Didache letters of early Christians, we learn that in a largely pagan environment, the Christians were known for a hitherto unheard of abhor-

rence toward adultery, sexual promiscuity, theft, sorcery, abortion and more. In the early days of Christianity, it was the laity which converted their society by personal relationships. While it was effective of the American bishops to protest against the American movie industry in the early 20th Century, in the modern world, where autonomy and individuality are now more fashionable than obedience, it is the task of the laity to once again convert society while remaining in it, and it is the task of religious leaders to empower the laity to do so.

As we have seen in the outcome of the movement against declining morals in the American motion picture industry, the attempt to convert society by legislation is not the most efficient way and perhaps not desirable. We also see that in the bishop's second attempt to implement the Catholic Legion of Decency, much less participation was garnered. In a culture of individuality, the

power of change lies with individuals and the responsibility of their preparation falls to the religious leaders.

To bring our culture to a more positive stance on moral issues, we must rely on the elements of culture, language, literature, music and more. These elements of culture must become more positive outlets of interior expression. Changing the ideas communicated by designers requires natural apostolate with this emerging class of leaders of a new and more individualized society. As design employs creativity to solve problems, we also seek creativity to bring design to more positive expression. Designers change society, but through personal friendship in the New Evangelization, society can change designers. ❀

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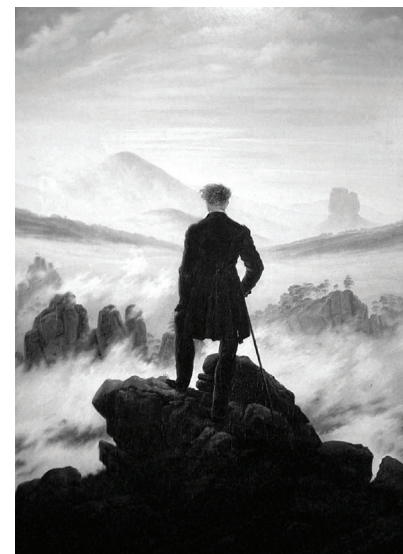
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