

*The Spirit retains the Spirit of the past within  
the depths of the present.*

–Hegel

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*photo by Benjamin Feldman*



*Editors' Letter*

Dear Reader,

This journal was created in light of our belief in the contemporary relevance of the western humanistic tradition and the value of assembling a plurality of perspectives based on its implications. The following is a collection of commentaries from our peers' finest reflections about the ideas related to this tradition. Seneca asked, "Quid est homo?" that is, what is it to be human? This might be thought of as the starting point for all of these entries which together serve to illuminate, affirm, and challenge the nature of the human condition.

We hope that this inaugural project will be sustained in future years. The exchange of perspectives about the western humanistic tradition and its foundational ideas is an essential way for this tradition to be refined and evaluated within what the Argentinian philosopher Eduardo Rabossi has described as a "culture of human rights." Having a journal that facilitates such an exchange is important for the prosperity of the Humanistic Studies program and its surrounding community. Please engage these writings with open eyes and continue to participate with your peers in dialogue about what it means to be human.

Cordially,  
Rebecca Grosz  
Jennifer Lee  
Michael Wagman



*photo by Rebecca Grosz*

## **Homer's *The Odyssey***

*Commentary by Michael Wagman*

Odysseus' character is interestingly contextualized in a well-known opposition in Presocratic philosophy between the world-views of Heraclitus and Parmenides. According to Heraclitus, the earth is composed of several elements - earth, fire, air, wa-

ter - and is ruled by strife. He famously describes the world in this way: “changing, it rests.” In his view, therefore, becoming is a part of being, as illustrated by the flow of a river or a flame. But according to Parmenides, the most famous Presocratic philosopher, there is no such cosmogony: being is without origin or change. He describes his notion of being with this rather opaque motto: “to be and not to be are the same and not the same.” His point is that nothing ever comes into being, since not being cannot exist. In broader terms, Heraclitus says that being involves becoming and consequently time and change, while Parmenides claims that being is outside of history and change, so that time is repressed. Heraclitus thus represents time and mortality, whereas Parmenides represents timelessness and immortality. Part of Odysseus’s appeal and richness as a literary character is that he seems to reconcile this sharp opposition by exercising an integrated approach. From one standpoint, Odysseus seems godlike because of his remarkable cunning and heroic leadership; he even romantically mingles with the immortals Calypso and Circe. But at the same time, Odysseus abandons Calypso’s island of timeless sexual pleasure because he longs for mortality, suffering, and time. Ultimately, Odysseus sides with Heraclitus by choosing death and thereby embracing his own humanity.

## **Hesiod’s *Works and Days*** *Commentary by Addy Litfin*

Irritating lines about women aside, Hesiod’s poem teaches interesting lessons that are based upon a solid moral founda-

tion. He values justice a great deal, but is also careful to say that, “May neither I nor my son be just men in this world, because it is a bad thing to be just if wrongdoers win the court decisions.” While he values the concept of justice, he also understands that fallible men are in control of the court system. I appreciate that he has a realistic view of human nature while outlining a utopian blueprint.

## Sappho’s Poetry

*Commentary by Addy Liftin*

Hesiod’s line in *Works and Days*, “You trust a thief when you trust a woman,” a sentiment that implies that woman are only concerned with finding a man to provide for them, is contradicted by the poetry of Sappho. Sappho finds herself torn to pieces by the love of others. She misses former loves, as evidenced by lines in her poetry like, “Farewell. Go in peace. But remember me. Don’t even forget how well I took care of you.” Like Hesiod, however, Sappho laments the cruelty of the world: “Why must we suffer so?”

Sappho’s poetry evokes many rich emotions all at once. Her poems are skillfully constructed so that the distant and muted screams of her passions seem to lurk behind the delicate descriptions of flowers and intertwined human bodies. Her poems speak of repression, dissatisfaction, and raw desire. It is no wonder that a poetess with the ability to illuminate such universal human sentiments has survived.



*Leave Krete and come to this  
holy temple  
Where the graceful grove of apple  
trees  
Circles an altar smoking with  
frankincense*

*Here roses leave shadow on the  
ground  
and cold springs babble through  
apple branches  
where shuddering leaves pour  
down profound sleep*

*In our meadow where horses  
graze  
and wild flowers spring blossom  
anise shoots fill the air with  
aroma.*

*—Sappho, translated by  
Willis Barnstone*



*photo by* Rebecca Grosz

**Protagorus' *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists***

*Commentary by Jennifer Lee*

Protagorus offers revolutionary answers to the question, what is it to be human? His main assertion is that “man is the measure of all things- of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.” Thus, pointing out, “there are two contradictory arguments about everything. With his ideas, the notions of subjectivity and the concepts of bias and context were born. These ideas are crucial to the definition of humankind, as we are notably a species of contradiction and prejudice. Protagorus ideas are extremely interesting and are still prevalent in the contemporary characterization of man. Presently acknowledged as the idea of relativism, it is such a broadly accepted form of rationale that we simply incorporate it into our stream of daily reasoning without much recognition.

**Protagorus' *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists***

*Commentary by Adèle-Elise Prévost*

Protagoras points out, “if contradictories are all simultaneously true of the same object, the obvious consequence is that everything will be one.” This brings to mind one of many such instances in contemporary physics. At the electron level, everything is one; and the quantum universe is woven of contradic-

tions. In another line, Protagoras notes, “the being of things consists in their being perceived. I see the moon, for example, while someone else does not see it; whether or not the moon exists is not clear.” This resonates with quantum physics, where it has been argued that “everything in the Universe only exists because we are looking at it.”<sup>1</sup> It seems that the Sophists are, in essence, wondering whether, when there happens to be no one there to hear it, a tree falling in the forest will in fact make a sound.

In the same passage, there is another unanswered question: “do you think that things have some stable being in themselves?” From a quantum perspective, one could say that what we perceive as a ‘stable being’ of things is nothing more than the amalgamation of probabilistic likelihoods of electron states. A telephone looks and acts like a telephone because its electrons happen to be likely to configure themselves in ways fitting to telephony. However, nothing about a telephone is inherently telephone-like; it is made up of the same stuff as a cat or a comet. There is therefore always the possibility - albeit a very slim one, because there are lots and lots of electrons in a telephone - that the telephone will take another configuration. And similar to Antiphon’s bed, it was other materials before it was a telephone, and will return to un-telephone-like component parts given the action of time. Thus we can argue that there is no ‘stable being’ that things have in themselves - just a superposition of likelihoods, reinforced by perception.

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<sup>1</sup>Gribbin, John. Schrödinger’s *Kittens and the Search for Reality*.

## Thucydides' *The Mytilene Debate* *Commentary by Addy Liftin*

This text addresses the nature of human beings when faced with complex questions of power relations among citizens. What happens when opposing governments clash? How is it possible to keep peace? What happens when fear is used as a motivational tactic? What is the right way to solve a conflict? It is worthwhile to compare the archaic Athenians' war-time tactics with those of the United States, as currently led by President George W. Bush. During the debates over whether or not to severely punish the Mytilene people, Cleon uses language that mirrors the rhetoric used by Bush and his supporters to justify the invasion of Iraq. Instead of acting with grace and compassion, Cleon tells his fellow citizens to avoid "yield[ing] to them out of pity" because if they do this "[they] are guilty of a weakness dangerous to yourselves." Admitting a mistake in judgment, he stresses, would amount to nothing but failure for the Athenians: "Besides, what can be more detestable than to be perpetually changing our minds?" Anyone who witnessed the most recent presidential debates [ed. October, 2004] is aware of the lines being replayed over and over by the Bush campaign: "If you're not with us, you're against us. We will not show signs of weakness. We will not change course." Similar to the Athenians in the magnitude of their power and influence, the United States rushed to invade Iraq, desperate to exert their power over the smaller nation. For both the US and Athens, showing weakness or signs of compassion towards one's enemy is seen as a recipe for disaster. Both governments are using God as a justification

for invasion. Both governments have “[made] enemies of [those] who are neutral” due to their aggressive problem-solving methods. In a line that seems eerie parallel to the situation in the United States, Cleon points out that “Dullness and modesty are a more useful combination than cleverness and license; and the more simple sort generally make better citizens than the more astute.”

## **Sophocles’ *Antigone***

*Commentary by Philip Tomlinson*

This play seems to present an inconsistency in Greek thinking. The man-made justice system punishes people for what is ultimately divine will. However, Fate removes a person’s responsibility for the choices he or she allegedly makes. This problem is illustrated by Creon’s insistence on punishing Polyneices for attacking Thebes although it is believed by the public that his fate was dictated by Zeus. Polyneices and his brother were merely “two of cruel fate.” There is the potential for human agency to be diminished to nothing and for societal law to seem like a futile measure aimed at creating order in a world that is controlled by the gods. There is a constant focus in the play on the intermediate, not acting in the extreme like Creon and Antigone do, but being temperate and humble. Perhaps there is room for supreme divine rule and meaningful human agency to coexist, but it seems that it must happen on a smaller level. The gods may set the course of the ship, but maybe humans can help manage the operation of the vessel.

## A poem inspired by Plato's *Phaedrus*

*It is a faery thing, to live;  
a momentary touch of magic, madness  
prized above all reason  
For in delicious madness  
resides the breath of life,  
a breath exchanged by two entwined in love;  
giving yourself in all to take another,  
for brief transports beyond  
to lose the isolation  
defining and dividing each from each.  
A faery thing indeed, wild like the heather;  
and on the limbs of lovers  
the dew of miracle shines.*

-Adèle-Elise Prévost

*photo by* Rebecca Grosz



**Plato's *Symposium***  
*Commentary by Philip Tomlinson*

An interesting quandary is raised by the uneven weight of importance given to our sensory perceptions. People are more inclined to seek aesthetic beauty since sight is generally the most relied upon perception. It is stated in the *Symposium* that “the most important kind of wisdom . . . goes by the names of justice and moderation.” The lack of sense organ to perceive justice well means that it is not likely to be encountered or pursued often, as human’s are simply not properly equipped to sense the concept. This situation suggests that aesthetics plays a significantly more important role as opposed to virtue in the progression of society. A resulting danger is that perhaps people merely try to create a world that appears just as opposed to one that actually embodies the form of justice. This rationale helps explain why people deceive themselves into thinking they live in a moral climate simply because they themselves are not suffering great injustices, while other people most certainly are.

**Epictetus' *The Manual***  
*Commentary by Philip Tomlinson*

Can free will exist to control things within one’s power, while fate controls the larger forces in life? In a society this “fate” could be the sum of everyone else’s free will interacting with each other through the daily decisions people make. If it

is possible to hold this belief then one can understand how both individualism and a brotherhood of man exist together in Stoicism.

Nick Drake's album *Five Leaves Left* embodies much stoical philosophy. The dreamy late sixties album contains lyrics that indicate a submission to the forces of nature and argue that one should only attempt to control what is within one's power. The album opens with the song "Time has Told Me." The title automatically suggests the transience of life due to nature. The album contains such lyrics as "And time has told me / Not to ask for more" and "Fame is but a fruit tree/ So very unsound. / It can never flourish 'til its stock is in the ground / So men of fame / Can never find a way / 'til time has flown far from their dying day." This last passage suggests that although earthly fame might later be achieved, that fame shall also one day perish and be succeeded by the fame of others. Stoicism and Epicureanism both allow one to step back and perceive the world through one's own eyes and not through social constructs imposed upon one living in an ordered, ideological society. Perception is focused on the individual perspective to allow more personal analysis of life.

## **New Testament, Matthew 5, 6, 7**

*Commentary by Caroline March*

*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

This quote is similar to many passages in Milton's *Paradise Lost* where blind faith was expected of the innocent Adam and Eve, however, even their small amount of knowledge led them to question this notion of the future and their future lives. Even before the Original Sin was committed, Adam would probe Raphael for answers, and just before the fall Michael was unable to satisfy Adam's want of knowledge regarding his future life. Perhaps then, no faith or doctrine can really be wholly accepted as the Bible asks; trust in God, given without understanding, cannot be wholly given.

## **Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*** *Commentary by Evan Malach*

Boethius' concerns about the suffering of the good mirror Job's. But while Boethius' Lady Philosophy answers this by arguing that evil is simply incomprehensible and ultimately illusory, the Biblical message seems to be that suffering brings wisdom - a lesson that may be applicable to Prometheus as well, the subject of Zeus' arbitrary injustice. In all three cases, it seems that suffering allows the sufferer to exhibit extreme piety, for they are given the chance to display the depth of their devotion.



*The mind forgets its  
inward light and turns in  
trust to the dark without.*



– Boethius

*photo by* Benjamin Feldman

## **Al-Farabi's *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle***

*Commentary by Talya Metz*

Al-Farabi is considered an essential figure in Muslim, Jewish and Christian thought. He is one of the major figures in Islamic Aristotelianism, and is responsible for many of the Islamic theories of logic and politics. In this reading, he discusses the importance of educating princes so that they will grow to govern justly and with the wisdom of philosophy. The princes should be taught practical arts, sciences, and virtues, as well as theoretical principles. He attempts to connect the ideas of Plato and Aristotle and also endeavors to reach a beyond-human ideal through human means of education and thought. Al-Farabi's ideal is the attainment of happiness and he believes happiness should be placed above all else. Happiness should be done for its own sake, as stated in Aristotelian ethics. Both Aristotle and Al-Farabi believe it is through contemplation and knowledge that one can attain happiness. Al-Farabi's imam is a philosopher-prince whose society values truth, justice, law, virtue, and philosophy, much like Plato's Republic. Al-Farabi compares the behaviour of nations to the behaviour of the individual, which also echoes Plato's work. Like many other philosophers, Al-Farabi places great importance on asking questions and knowing that there are limits to human intellect. He emphasizes the importance of listening to others and contemplating what is taught.

## **Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*** *Commentary by Talya Metz*

Maimonides was born in Cordoba, Spain and is considered to be one of the most influential Jewish philosophers. He believed that reason should guide everything, as long as the Bible's doctrines were not sacrificed. His *Guide for the Perplexed*, which was originally written in Arabic, took him 15 years to complete, and in it he urges the search for a rational philosophy of Judaism. He claims that ordinary people should rely on faith, not philosophical reasoning about ultimate matters (which he says are not helpful or necessary for these people). However, for members of the educated elite, who are more capable of understanding abstract philosophical reasoning, there is more hope for success.

Maimonides cites reason as the primary source for human knowledge. He believed that humans are all political beings by nature and that each human has their own specialties. Humans rely on each other, and each other's skill in order to survive. If we all do what we do best, humanity will benefit. Maimonides emphasized the importance of laws, since they create order between people. Without this type of structure - which creates stability within our society - selfish, greedy people could potentially take over. Philosophy is a source of knowledge that prevents chaos, and without laws evil might prevail. He makes connections with Aristotle; since Maimonides believed that Aristotle reached the highest level of understanding a human being can reach short of prophecy. However, he disagrees with many of Aristotle's views on philosophy, especially his ideas regarding

man's duty in the world. Aristotle said that humans are distinct from animals because of their ability to rationalize and reason (making the human mind our greatest element of nature). Maimonides, on the other hand, believes that one should have total faith in God, and through this connection and understanding of God, we can attain the knowledge we need in order to be happy and live fulfilled lives. The most important aspect of the Hebrew Bible is the idea of loving God. God is the main focus and the most important part of the Jewish religion (as it is, of course, with many other religions as well).

Maimonides stresses how crucial it is to study philosophy; emphasizing the importance of means rather than ends. We must all organize our lives in an order that allows us to accomplish essential tasks more efficiently and effectively. It is important that we organize our lives in a proper way that allows us to complete all aspects of life well.

## **Dante's *Inferno***

*Commentary by Jessica Henry*

What is the underlying logic of the structure of *Inferno*? The degradation and disintegration of personality and community. One indicative example is in Canto 26 where the falsifiers of coins are placed in the inner circles of hell because they abused the means of communal exchange. Another good example described in Canto 34 is the tenth circle of hell, the fundament of the world, which has four regions of increasing betrayal and

treason moving from family to country to guests to oaths and vows. All of the symbolic characters - from Cain to Brutus and Cassius - represent the destruction of personality and community.

Dante's choice of a poet as his guide implicitly salutes Plato's Republic. Plato criticizes the potentially illusive character of poetic imagery. But the concluding Myth of Ur validates allegorical poetry that is based on philosophy. Dante therefore establishes Virgil and himself as the kind of philosophical poets that Plato sanctioned.

## **Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*** *Commentary by Mike Wagman*

Montaigne portrays the Renaissance unromantically. He depicts suffering and chaos rather than artistic opulence or the bliss of intellectual rediscovery. But Montaigne's grumbling is not inconsistent with the intellectual tides of the Renaissance. Although there is a sense of exhilaration and liberation in much of the period's art and writing, many works express feelings of dislocation and apprehension. Despite some optimistic elements of his philosophy, Montaigne is preoccupied with the latter sentiment of anxiety. His *Essays* show that his concerns are survival and the preservation of his own dignity rather than the exuberant and ambitious projects of earlier Renaissance figures like Pico della Mirandola and Leonardo da Vinci.

## Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* *Commentary by Rebecca Grosz*

Although critics have struggled to categorize the character of Isabella in this play, several parts of the play highlight her as being angelically pure. For example, she explains that she would die in Claudio's place if sacrificing her chastity was not morally superior. "Is't not kind of incest to take life from thine own sister's shame," she challenges Claudio. Her piety is reflected again when she begs Angelo to treat Claudio with mercy. Although she believes that his crime is worthy of punishment, she does not think that death is an appropriately proportionate measure. She reminds Angelo that "all the souls that were, were forfeit once / And He that might the 'vantage best have took, / Found out the remedy." She appeals to Christ's decision not to punish all of mankind for the original sin prior to Christian revelation. She tries to convince Angelo that he should treat Claudio mercifully and thereby mirror the way Christ treats him. True to type, Isabella prioritizes the soul over the body: "Better it were a brother died at once than a sister be redeeming him, should die forever." She asserts the supremacy of divine law when she declares to the friar, "I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit." Some critics have understood Isabella's refusal to save Claudio's life as a reflection of a harsh character, but the fact that this refusal is based on piety underscores her commitment to Christian virtue. It is even possible to view Isabella's acquiescence to the bed trick plan as another indication of her piety, since she does so because of the friar's suggestion. Even though the "friar" is actually the Duke in dis-

guise, Isabella thinks she is following the advice of a Church superior. It is also plausible to view the Duke's proposal to Isabella at the play's uneasy end as a reflection of the Duke's negative character rather than Isabella's. It is thus evident that Isabella can be seen as a positive character, especially if one sympathizes with her choice to let her religious values supercede the issue of saving her brother.

## **Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*** *Commentary by Sarah Camber*

Isabella is not an angel confronted by an impossible dilemma; she is full of bad traits. Some critics argue, for example, that her desire to save her soul rather than her brother is selfish. Her selfishness seems especially harsh when she remarks to Claudio, "Better it were a brother died at once, / than a sister, by redeeming him, / should die forever." Why must she emphasize to her brother that she has the capacity to save his life when she is unwilling to do so? As one critic points out, she plays "a grim game with a man facing the axe, hinting, hesitating, but not quite revealing how he may escape death." Isabella is also a hypocrite. She refuses to sacrifice her own chastity to save Claudio's life, but has no problem substituting Marianna's instead. Isabella also comes across as a pathetic character, particularly in the final scene. There she pleads for Angelo's life to be spared despite the fact that he has presented her with a difficult dilemma. Why does she now stand up for him? She also

stands up for the Duke, who has tricked her about his identity until the final scene. He also fooled her into believing that her brother was dead. It seems clear, therefore, that Isabella is selfish, hypocritical, and pathetic; in other words, she is a negative character.

## **Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*** *Commentary by Sarah Berger-Richardson*

For every positive description of the Duke there is an equally valid negative one. It can be said that the Duke's laxity is a sign that he was a bad ruler. In trying to be kind, the Duke actually contributed to the disorder of Vienna. However, when the play opens Vincentio explains to Escalus that his past leniency may not have been the best thing for his people, and that sometimes a ruler has to be cruel to be kind. He acknowledges his past errors, and seeks to make amends for them. Vincentio decides that this should be done by temporarily handing over his powers to Angelo, who will be strict and enforce the law. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes a similar situation when Duke Borgia temporarily gives the cruel Messer Remirro de Orco absolute power in order to reestablish peace. De Orco's harshness gets the job done, but also angers the citizens. The Duke distances himself from de Orco's behavior and has him executed. Critics of the Duke question why he does not shoulder the responsibility of his past actions and enforce the law himself. It is for the same reason de Orco did not, which is that the first job of a good duke is to appear legitimate in the eyes of his citizens.

Some critics argue that Vincentio plays the role of a divine being. The perspective of the Duke performing the role of an allegorical God can be seen throughout the play. For example, in the fifth act, Angelo himself even goes as far as to compare the Duke to a supreme power. Once the reader realizes that the Duke is playing God, it becomes very hard to criticize him. Individuals who do not believe in Judeo-Christian theology may continue to criticize the Duke, but people who do, and believe that God is perfect, cannot. Critics of this analogy point out that the Duke's lack of absolute control over the situations he finds himself in implies that he is not an allegorical figure for God.

It is thus clear that the Duke's less than flattering behavior can be seen in a positive light. In all fairness, as well as being a good ruler, the Duke also does a few genuinely nice things in the play. When he adopts the friar's habit, the Duke tries to console Claudio and demonstrates that "he wishes to increase his moral distance from the cauldron of corruption and atone for his share in it by working on the souls of sinners."<sup>2</sup> He even succeeds when, in the first scene of the third act, Claudio "repents of his errors and submits to spiritual correction."<sup>3</sup> While he may be at fault for having created the mess that Claudio, Isabella, and Angelo find themselves in, he makes up for it by going "to inordinate lengths to make sure that everything turns out well."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the Duke does demonstrate positive qualities that

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<sup>2</sup>Berger Jr., Harry. *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*.

<sup>3</sup>Scragg, Leah. *Shakespeare's Alternative Tales*.

<sup>4</sup>Berger, Jr.

every reader, including atheists and anti-Machiavellians, should be able to acknowledge.

**Rene Descartes' *A Discourse on Method***  
*Commentary by Jessica Henry*

Descartes' argument for God's existence is rigorously logical. His method is geometric, constructed so that each pivotal claim of the argument relies on its preceding proofs and anticipates the consequent assertions. This renders any refutation of his proof impossible unless it can defeat a specific step in his logic. He begins with hyperbolic doubt to raze the foundation of all knowledge. Then he establishes certain formative arguments beyond his doubt and uses each one as a stepping-stone that leads to the next stage of his claim. Therefore, the demonstrated certainty of the Cogito is entirely contingent upon doubting all else. Similarly, the truth of ideas and their attached implications can only be confirmed by first accepting the existence of the Cogito. Finally, Descartes is only able to conclude that God necessarily exists because he has already proven the ramifications of the existence of the idea of God and what its objective reality must indicate. Thus, unless one of these crucial stepladders of the Cartesian argument can be dismantled on its own terms, then the argument's conclusion that God exists should be accepted as true. It seems entirely possible, however, to challenge the argument under these conditions.

*photo by Rebecca Grosz*



## Blaise Pascal's *Of the Necessity of the Wager*

*Commentary by Michael Wagman*

A nutshell of Pascal's argument: You don't know whether or not God exists so you can live as if God exists or you can live as if God does not exist. The problem is that if you live as if God does not exist and it turns out that God does exist then you are eternally damned. Wagering based on probability, then, it is most wise to live as if God does exist because you lose nothing if God does not exist and you gain everything if God does exist. I think this is a forceful argument, especially since it appeals to the agnostic position, which is traditionally difficult to counter with theistic arguments. However, there is one clearly shaky premise: that if God doesn't exist and you live as if God does exist then "you lose nothing." The skeptical interlocutor could interject here: I lose nothing, you say, Pascal? What a short-sighted view! I lose only my entire life, which I would have lived differently had I known that God did not exist. Perhaps, then, the critical question for the wagerer is whether or not the religious life has intrinsic value. If she decides that it does not, then Pascal's argument loses much of its force.

**John Locke's *A Letter on Toleration***  
*Commentary by Joelle Ruskin*

What is man's capacity for tolerance? The answer to this question is perhaps reflected in Locke's own attempt to demonstrate tolerance. Though Locke presents a thoughtful and powerful argument about why tolerance is necessary and how it can be exercised effectively and by whom, the fact remains that he does so through a Christian framework. When humanists think of freedom of inquiry and toleration, civil liberties and the rights of man, they think of the Church as obscurantist and oppressor and of the freethinkers as bearers of the enlightenment and campaigners for emancipation. Locke emphasizes the quality of all persons in their creation by God but this presupposes a belief or faith in God. Moreover, Locke's argument also reflects his belief in the concept of a soul which is fundamentally a Christian value. Locke, as well as other philosophers and artists who played an historical part in establishing freedom of inquiry and civil liberties were mostly religious men, though unorthodox. Locke states, "Nor can the magistrate tolerate atheists, because oaths and promises have no meaning for those who do not believe in God." Where is the toleration in such a sentiment? Obviously, Locke's use of toleration is conditional to a Christian code of values that excludes the possibility that another would not believe in the absence of a God. Locke demonstrates that man's ability to tolerate the other usually has limits built into his own condition. This is perhaps one of the most insurmountable problems in civilization. To what extent will man ever be able to step away from his own set of morals and beliefs accept

the other as he truly is?

George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* illustrates the struggle for tolerance and empathy. In this non-fictional narrative Orwell attempts to provoke all the classes of England to realize their own oppression and recognize the tyranny of their conditions within that society. For the first half of the book, he dresses like a tramp to be accepted by the lower class and attempts to disguise his "upper-lower-middle-class" mannerisms, like his dialect, so that he can fit in with the working class. What becomes increasingly clear is that however hard Orwell tries to fit in and empathize with the lower class by adopting their way of life, he is constantly self-conscious. While Orwell might be the most sympathetic member of the upper class, he is still unable to totally empathize with the other and in the end, can not even "tolerate" their smell.

***Adam Smith's *Of the beauty which the appearance of Utility bestows upon all the production of art, and of the extensive influence of this species of Beauty****  
*Commentary by Joelle Ruskin*

According to Smith beauty lies in the use value of a commodity. Smith seems to have hijacked the term from its aesthetic and religious roots and infused it with his economic philosophy. However, he maintains the causal connection between beauty

and pleasures which is implicit in both the aesthetic and religious understandings of the word. Smith's discourse reveals that while pleasure, and therefore beauty, is originally rooted in the use value of a commodity, it is more often the "aptness of the machines which are fitted to promote it." Pleasure is derived from the knowledge of the potential uses of a certain commodity not necessarily the actual use of it. Smith's theory provides insight into the nature of man. It reveals that man consumes goods in order to fulfill a desire to own something that has possibility - he therefore consumes what he does not necessarily need. This develops into a competition for material goods since man seems to base his personal value on that of his goods. As such, the nature of beauty becomes questionable because it is no longer affiliated with the actual entity but with the idea of the entity. The abstraction of the concept of beauty looks towards another paradigm of Smith's philosophy which is related to the notion of representation, in particular "image". For Smith, the image becomes an integral aspect of his economic philosophy because it is a force for competition - people want what the image represents and thus compete for that end.

The consumption and competition for material goods that Smith cites in his essay, as well as his focus on the idea of beauty rather than beauty itself, is also addressed by Walter Benjamin in his essay, "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" written in the 1940. Benjamin, like Smith, analyses how competition and the commodification of art change its original nature. While Smith uses the example of the watch to explain how the idea of the watch is what is important rather than the use value of the watch itself, Benjamin focuses more on aesthet-

ics. Unlike Smith though, Benjamin does not see the positive economic consequences of this competition. For Benjamin mechanical reproduction and competition destroy the uniqueness of art. People compete to own their own Monet or to go see the pyramids, which are now conveniently located in Las Vegas. The original artwork loses its uniqueness or, in Benjamin's terms, its 'aura'. Art becomes a casualty on Smith's road to economic stability, a road that sees many casualties along the way.

Carlyle, Ruskin, Herbert Spencer, T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold would all agree with Benjamin - that Smith's utilitarianism threatens art. While these men were not collaborators, they shared the same ultimate concern and underlying purpose. They were resisting the destructive tendencies of the industrial revolution and laissez-faire economics - moral, social, physical and cultural. And they were anxious that the expansion and diffusion of the arts and sciences and of industry and commerce should bring joy and happiness and fulfillment to the masses. The physical, social and moral conditions on which the new forces of progress could elevate the dignity and enhance the worth of human living, progress and civilization as the humanization of man in society, this was their common theme.

Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*  
*Commentary by Evan Malach*

Darwin tries to trace the genesis and the development of the human moral faculties along the lines of evolutionary biology. He describes the human moral conscience, for example, as a trained response to the experiences of pleasure and pain and the societal approbation and disapprobation that come as a consequence of the related actions. But Darwin also offers unique insights into the more general subject of moral philosophy. In the 19th century, the popular distinction within moral philosophy was between Intuitionists, who concentrated on the notion of moral sense, and Utilitarians, who emphasized the principle of greatest happiness. Darwin's argument synthesizes these opposed views, since he claims that it is precisely the instinctive moral sense that has produced the greatest good and it is the foundation for good to exist in the first place.

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*

–United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights

## Richard Rorty's *Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality*

*Commentary by Aaron David*

Following the philosopher Rabossi, Rorty believes that foundationalism is outmoded and that we have moved beyond the debate between Plato and Nietzsche regarding the question of the ahistorical nature of human beings into a more efficient culture of human rights. In light of human malleability, according to Rorty, it is not sensible anymore to believe that there is an ahistorical human nature; and even if there is an ahistorical human nature, nothing in it "is relevant to our moral choices." We have grown to this point during the last two hundred years through the progress of sentimental education. "This progress consists in an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences."

Drawing a connection to Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* can be seen as a test case for Rorty's thesis about how sentimental education is supposed to move us. Was I moved by Mistry's novel as Rorty thinks I should be? Certainly, but I think my desire to spread human rights further is more powerful when it is based on a more solid moral foundation in the Platonic and Kantian spirit. I just do not see how it can be binding or even more effective to "rely on the suggestion of sentiment rather than on the commands of reason."



*photo by* Benjamin Feldman

*For you are not that which your outward form declares: the mind of each man is his true self, not that shape which can be pointed out with the finger.*

- Cicero

## Meditations in Time of Civil War

*The bees build in the crevices  
Of loosening masonry, and there  
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.  
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*A barricade of stone or of wood;  
Some fourteen days of civil war;  
Last night they trundled down the road  
That dead young soldier in his blood:  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

*We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;  
More substance in our enmities  
Than in our love;  
O honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.*

- W.B. Yeats