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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PUBLISHING a peer-reviewed academic journal is a serious endeavor that requires a major time commitment, a penchant for attention to detail, and most importantly, advisors and supporters who are invested in the publication of a quality final product. To that end, there are several people we would like to thank for helping us bring this edition of the Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School to fruition.

Kathryn (Katie) Caponera, the Assistant Director for Student Services Programming in Harvard Divinity School’s Office of Student Life, has provided invaluable support over the last nine months. Katie has assisted with financial resources, layout considerations, and leadership transitions. This volume would not exist without her advice, wisdom, and encouragement.

Jason Smith, Editor-in-Chief of the 2016 and 2017 editions of the journal, has passed along a great deal of practical wisdom from prior editorial leadership teams. He is truly invested in seeing this publication succeed in the long term, and without all his notes and templates, our job would have been far more difficult and time-consuming.

Our student editorial board has also made a crucial contribution to this volume. In the fall, they advertised our call for papers to professors and academic programs around the world, and in the spring, each student evaluated and edited two to three submissions. This journal only exists because of the HDS students who devote their time and effort to it each year.

An anonymous faculty review board is also integral to the success of this endeavor. Our Harvard University faculty help us select final pieces for publication, and their expertise is invaluable as we ensure that the scholarship we publish is both novel and reliable.

Professor Anne Monius has also acted as the long-time Faculty Advisor to this journal, and her consistent dedication is greatly appreciated as we
This 2018-2019 volume is published by Editor-in-Chief Julia Hintlian, Managing Editors Fatema Elbakoury, Yang Qu, and Bo Clay, and Layout Editor Emily Chazen. However, during the 2017-2018 academic year, another review board selected and completed preliminary edits on two of our pieces: *Critical Spaces in Post-9/11 Cinema* and *The Terror and the Glory: The Two Witnesses and God’s Self-Vindication in Revelation 11*. This review board was led by Editors-in-Chief Sana Saeed and Morgan Curtis as well as Managing Editors Lillian McCabe and Bo Clay, and they must be recognized for their diligent work.

Finally, we would like to thank the HDS Student Association for supporting this publication financially so that we can continue to offer a professionally printed version of the journal each year. In particular, we would like to recognize Fatema Elbakoury—one of our Managing Editors—for acting as an advocate and liaison for the journal in the HDS Student Association meetings.
Dear Readers,

The Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School has transitioned through several iterations over the last decade, but in this relatively brief period, it has grown to be a robust space wherein complex yet necessary discussion is generated. The role of theology in our society, the importance of critically-minded interrogation in the field of Religious Studies, and the ethical dimensions of sound research: these are the interests that charge our approach to publication. With a wonderful team of student editors, a brilliant panel of faculty reviewers, and thought-provoking submissions, we can continue to explore our values in this edition of the journal.

For the first time this year, we have selected pieces that broadly coalesce around a specific theme: “space.” We encourage readers to consider how our authors incorporate spatial lenses into their physical, intellectual, and cultural examinations of religion. However, philosophy, aesthetics, and linguistics also factor prominently into this issue, and we have realized that perhaps the most invigorating aspect of Religious Studies is its demand for an interdisciplinary approach to itself. This excites us, and we hope you are also moved by the diversity of work represented here.

Our volume commences with Will Walker’s article “Unhiddenness and Anti-Humanism: Rehabilitating Heidegger’s Philosophy of Truth,” in which he ponders how the work of Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther, Søren Kierkegaard, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer informs an ethical conversation on truth as ἀλήθεια.

Eric Hilker’s piece “Talking about Space: Intersubjective Linguistic Practices and the Material Construction of Norms” dialogues with the work of Kevin Hector and Sharon Zukin to examine inclusivity in the common spaces of theological institutions and public parks.
With his article “Critical Spaces in Post-9/11 Cinema,” Jacob McLain explores Islamophobia through a Media Studies lens that provides the reader with a unique toolkit to analyze any representation of minorities in cinema.

Justin Schoolcraft’s “The Terror and the Glory: The Two Witnesses and God’s Self-Vindication in Revelation 11” considers fear in the Book of Revelation, and more broadly highlights the critical role fear plays in our quotidian lives.


Finally, our culminating interview is with University of Pennsylvania Professor Justin McDaniel, who is inspired to find parallels between academic and monastic learning by asking the question “How Does a Buddhist Learn to be a Buddhist?”

We are humbled by the support we have received and by the outstanding submissions that have found their way to us. We hope you will enjoy this issue of the *Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School.*

Sincerely,
Julia Hintlian, *Editor-in-Chief*
Fatema Elbakoury, *Managing Editor*
Yang Qu, *Managing Editor*
Bo Clay, *Managing Editor*
Emily Chazen, *Layout Editor*
UNHIDDENNESS AND ANTI-HUMANISM: REHABILITATING HEIDEGGER’S PHILOSOPHY OF TRUTH

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The Problem of Heidegger

Two profound, life-altering events occurred in the career of Martin Heidegger in the decade after the publication of his magnum opus, Being and Time. First, his position on the most essential aspects of his thinking—ontology, metaphysics, human existence—started to shift. As Lee Braver puts it in his helpful introduction to Heidegger’s later work: “In the years after Being and Time was published, Heidegger’s thinking and writing style underwent a profound change which he called the ‘Kehre’ or turning, splitting his career into two phases.” In particular, where Heidegger’s earlier work involved a systematic and ahistorical analytic of Dasein’s (or humanity’s) relation to reality, the later essays emphasize the utter contingency and dependency of human beings on the given-ness of the world. In Braver’s words, Heidegger’s later work “abandons fundamental ontology by starting with Being rather than with us,” fundamentally uprooting and reorienting the classic, humanist assumption that we are the central feature of everything-

1 I’m deeply grateful to the many readers, who helped clarify, streamline, and improve this draft. In particular, I want to thank Michael Mango, Ocean Gibson, Ailie Posillico, Alejandra Oliva, and Professor Dan McKanan, for providing thoughtful and constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also want to give special thanks to Professors Michelle Sanchez and Sean Kelly, without whom this paper (or the thinking behind it) would not have been possible.

that-is.

However, that intellectual transformation was not the only lasting effect of the 1930s on Heidegger’s career. On the contrary, as Gregory Fried notes in the *LA Review of Books*: “In April 1933, [Heidegger] took on the leadership of Freiburg University under the new Nazi regime, joined the Party in an elaborate public ceremony in May, helped enforce anti-Jewish laws against faculty and students, gave speeches in favor of Hitler’s decisive plebiscite in November—and then abruptly resigned his position as head, or rector, of the university in April 1934.” In other words, along with Heidegger’s shift in thinking came a disastrous shift in public politics—a change that would forever tie Heidegger to National Socialism and the destruction wrought by Hitler’s Germany.

Of course, attempts to map a direct correspondence between Heidegger’s philosophy and Heidegger’s politics are often overblown—not least of all because Heidegger’s personal political convictions are far from transparent. And yet, the striking convergence of Heidegger’s philosophical turn against humanism and his affiliation with the Nazi party demands some attention, if only because it reveals the striking absence of any serious political or ethical thought within the Heideggerian corpus.

It will be the purpose of this paper, then, to explore the nature of this connection more thoroughly. In particular, after examining Heidegger’s turn against humanism—especially the way it is manifested in his revolutionary account of “truth”—I will attempt to provide an intellectual genealogy for Heidegger’s thinking: one that traces his insights back to the work of Martin Luther through the Danish existentialist Søren Kierkegaard. In an attempt to save Heidegger’s philosophy from itself, I will compare Heidegger’s thinking to the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian and contemporary of Heidegger, whose own Lutheran, anti-humanist philosophy culminates in a robust set of ethics (which famously led to Bonhoeffer’s involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Third Reich). It is my hope that this paper will not only elucidate certain, essential qualities of Heidegger’s thinking after the *Kehre*, but will also provide an alternative to Heidegger’s thought—one that necessitates deep and considered reflection on ethics and “the good.”

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3 Ibid., 3.


Heidegger’s Anti-Humanism: Truth and ἀλήθεια

In order to understand Heidegger’s *Kehre* and the turn against humanism more generally, we must first explicate one of the central features of that turn: Heidegger’s account of “truth,” a radical reinterpretation that sets the table for everything that comes next. Indeed, as early as 1930, Heidegger was already reevaluating the history of ontology and “especially the way [the Greeks] set the course for Western thought’s understanding of truth.”6 In Heidegger’s view, classical Greek thought—particularly the work of Plato—fundamentally revolutionized the West’s understanding of what truth consists in, laying the foundation upon which Descartes and the Enlightenment would eventually build upon.

What is the nature of that change? In Heidegger’s view, it is best exemplified by a close reading of the “Allegory of the Cave” from Plato’s *Republic*, conducted most extensively in his 1942 essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth.” The historical veracity of this reading is (as always, with Heidegger’s work) extremely suspect. And yet, there is a kind of internal coherence that lends philosophical—if not historical—credibility to his approach. In particular, according to Heidegger, all history before Plato was characterized by a regime of truth best termed ἀλήθεια [*aletheia*], or, as Heidegger translates it, “unhiddenness.” As he explicates early in the essay: “The unhidden and its unhiddenness designate at each point what is present and manifest in the region where human beings happen to dwell.”7 Before Plato, then, everything-that-is was conceptualized in terms of its revelation to human beings at a particular moment—the way things became “unhidden” to us. Consequently, if something was true to a pre-Socratic, that meant that it was being disclosed in some way—that it was shining forth or revealing itself to human beings in the region where they “happen to dwell.”

However, this different understanding of truth was not just the result of a different lexicon. Instead, Heidegger wants to insist that ἀλήθεια brings along its own philosophical implications. As he puts it: “two factors are essential to the unhidden: not only does it in some way or other render accessible whatever appears and keeps it revealed in its appearing, but it constantly overcomes a hiddenness of the hidden. The unhidden must be torn away from a hiddenness; it must in a sense be stolen from hiddenness.”8

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6 Braver, 2.
8 Ibid., 171.
In effect, for Heidegger, truth is not merely a kind of revelation. It also necessitates—and always comes concomitant with—a “hiddenness.” Phrased differently, under the ἀλήθεια gestalt, for something to be true, it must not only disclose itself, but must do so in spite of, or in conflict with some kind of hiddenness. Truth, in this conception, is always a strife or a struggle—a making manifest of that which would otherwise remain undisclosed and out of human view.

Which, at least in Heidegger’s understanding, is substantively different from the kind of “truth” that gets inaugurated in Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” In particular, in The Republic, “the expository power behind the images of the ‘allegory’ is concentrated on the role played by the fire, the fire’s glow, the shadows it casts, the brightness of day, the sunlight and the sun. Everything depends on the shining forth of whatever appears and on making its visibility possible.”9 In other words, truth, in Plato’s context, is not initiated by the independent revelation of different entities themselves, but by the brightness of an external light. Consequently in Plato’s world, everything already exists as “unhidden” or “unconcealed.” All that is required for us to understand things properly is for them to be made intelligible by an exterior source: in the case of The Republic, the illumination provided by the sun.

But what is the source of that illumination? For Plato, it is the “idea of the good,” the essential criterion that “enable[s] something to appear in its whatness and thus be present in its constancy.”10 In effect: truth, for Plato, has to do with a kind of visibility; it is essentially involved with accurately portraying what already stands before us.

Crucially, in the “Allegory of the Cave,” Heidegger identifies the coming of a radically new and historically divergent account of truth. Rather than ἀλήθεια, where things make themselves manifest to us in discrete moments of disclosure, Plato introduces an “ontotheological” metaphysics; for him, “the ideas are what is in everything that is. Therefore, what makes every idea be capable as an idea—in Plato’s expression: the idea of all ideas—consists in making possible the appearing, in all its visibility, of everything present.”11 In more plain English: since all things, in Plato’s Republic, are manifestations of metaphysical ideas—and since the most essential idea, which everything else is made visible by, is the “idea of the good”—“truth” is no longer what is wrested from hiddenness. Instead, “the assertion of a judgment made by

9  Ibid., 172.
10  Ibid., 175.
11  Ibid.
the intellect is the place of truth and falsehood and of the difference between them. The assertion is called true insofar as it conforms to the state of affairs and is thus a ὀμοίωσις [omoiosis].”

Rather than being attentive and receptive to the truth that manifests in discrete moments of revelation, the Platonist sees herself as the ground of truth and falsity. Truth is no longer an “unhiddenness” to be experienced, but a correctness—a representational accuracy—to be actively willed and sought after.

We can see, then, why this revolutionary account of truth might underlie the development of later secularism and humanism. Indeed, as Heidegger freely explicates, “with this transformation of the essence of truth there takes place at the same time a change of the locus of truth. As unhiddenness, truth is still a fundamental trait of beings themselves. But as the correctness of the ‘gaze,’ it becomes a characteristic of human comportment towards being.”

Consequently, rather than accepting the “truth of being”—the fact that existence is given to human beings, in a particular way, at a particular time, outside of our willed control—modern humanity starts to interpret itself as the ground of everything-that-is. Rather than acting passively and receptively towards the world, humanity begins down the path that will lead, inevitably (in Heidegger’s view), towards Nietzsche-an domination, control, and will-to-power. At least, that is the story Heidegger wanted to tell in 1942.

Luther, God and Hiddenness

Closer analysis reveals some notable problems with Heidegger’s account of truth. For one thing, while ἀλήθεια has definite formal structure, it doesn’t appear to have any real content. On the contrary, as Heidegger explicates in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” an essay from the mid-1930s: “The unconcealedness of beings—this is never a merely existent state, but a happening. Unconcealedness (truth) is neither an attribute of factual things in the sense of beings, nor one of propositions.” In effect, truth does not have any special criterion by which it can be measured; it is, by its very nature, not more or less true based on its correspondence to some objective standard. Instead, truth is merely the process of disclosure itself: it is “the primal conflict in which that open center is won within which

12 Ibid., 178.
13 Ibid., 177.
what is, stands, and from which it sets itself back into itself.”

Thus, it would be impossible to assign truth any sort of ethical value or moral dimension. In Heidegger’s view, truth as \( \text{άλήθεια} \) is categorically all process and no substance.

Secondly—and, for our purposes, more importantly—Heidegger assumes that, since the age of the pre-Socratics, truth as \( \text{άλήθεια} \) has disappeared entirely. Indeed, the thrust of Heidegger’s historical project depends upon the drawing of a clean line from Plato, to Descartes, to Kant, to Nietzsche. As Richard Rorty puts it, in Heidegger’s view:

> [E]ver since Plato we have been asking ourselves the question: what must we and the universe be like if we are going to get the sort of certainty, clarity, and evidence Plato told us we ought to have? Each stage in the history of metaphysics... has been an attempt to describe things so that this certainty might become possible. But, after many fits and starts, it has turned out that the only thing we can be certain about is what we want. The only things that are really evident to us are our own desires.

For Heidegger, in other words, the history of Western philosophy is both singular and linear. It is a kind of “downward escalator” from the pre-Socratic attitude of contingency and dependency, to contemporary narcissism and nihilism, with no stops in between.

However, in Heidegger’s eagerness to refute and contradict the self-aggrandizing character of the humanist Enlightenment, he overlooks (or at least, does not sufficiently account for) another dominant thread in Western philosophy—Lutheran pietism. Indeed, a closer look at Luther’s own theological work—especially his account of the “hiddenness” of God—reveals a natural successor to Greek \( \text{άλήθεια} \): a notion of truth and goodness that takes, as its basis, the contingent, dependent disclosure of something outside human ken.

Take, as a particularly salient example, the debate between Luther and Erasmus in 1524-5. Indeed, in many ways, Erasmus is the archetype of the

15 Ibid., 53.
17 Of course, Heidegger’s deep consideration of Medieval Christianity and, in particular, Augustine, complicates this story. However, in many works—like “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” and the four-volume Nietzsche lectures—this does seem to be the “history of being” Heidegger presents.
Platonic humanist Heidegger wants to condemn. As Luther characterizes in the first half of his polemic, “On the Bondage of the Will:”

On the authority of Erasmus... free choice is a power of the will that is able of itself to will and unwill the word and work of God, by which it is led to those things which exceed both its grasp and its perception. But if it can will and unwill, it can also love and hate, and if it can love and hate, it can also in some small degree do the works of the law and believe the gospel... This plainly means attributing divinity to free choice, since to will the law and the gospel, to unwill sin and to will death, belongs to divine power alone.\textsuperscript{18}

Of course, the Christian language here is largely unfamiliar to Heidegger’s more secular vocabulary. Similarly, Luther and Erasmus’s dispute is concentrated on goodness, rather than truth. And yet, the formal structure of Erasmus’s position (at least, as it is characterized by Luther) is almost uncannily similar to Heidegger’s portrayal of the Platonist.

Indeed, Erasmus, in classic humanist fashion, believes that “[f]ree choice is a power of the will”—that we are individually responsible for the good that we do on earth and conformity to an absolute moral law. Consequently—as Luther explicitly spells out—for Erasmus, both self-generated action and self-generated salvation are readily within the purview of mankind. After all, if our will can manifest “love and hate... [and] can also in some small degree do the works of the law and believe the gospel,” it necessarily follows that our free choice has a kind of divinity: the power to “to unwill sin and to will death.” As in “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” Erasmus has shifted the locus of truth. Rather than existing outside of human beings, Erasmusian “goodness” inhabits and, in some sense, constitutes the human will.

And yet—predictably—for Luther, this shift is hugely unsatisfying. For one thing, it results in a kind of radical anthropocentrism. As Luther declaims just a few pages earlier:

\begin{quote}
[W]e have shown above that free choice properly belongs to no one but God alone. You might perhaps rightly attribute some measure of choice to man, but to attribute free choice to him in relation to divine things is too much; for the term ‘free choice,’
\end{quote}

in the judgment of everyone’s ears, means (strictly speaking) that which can do and does, in relation to God, whatever it pleases, uninhibited by any law or any sovereign authority.\footnote{Ibid., 170.}

In other words, to assume that the will can make progress towards its own salvation is to reinvent the cosmic picture of responsibility and divine authority from the ground-up. In Heidegger’s language, it would be for “man, precisely as the one so threatened, [to] exalt himself to the posture of lord of the earth”—for human beings to imagine themselves as the kind of entities that could change their own ontological status.\footnote{Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in \textit{The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays}, trans. by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), 27.}

However, in Luther’s mind, that cosmology is both erroneous and dangerous. As he explains earlier in his polemic, “in relation to God, or in matters pertaining to salvation or damnation, a man has no free choice, but is a captive, subject and slave either of the will of God or the will of Satan.”\footnote{Luther, 143.}

Our free “choice” exists only over things “lower” than us—in matters of cosmic fate, or ultimate truth, humanity is absolutely dependent on the intervention of non-human divinities.

Indeed, for Luther, the very notion that human beings could will their own salvation—much less will the truth—is a kind of structural impossibility. As he explains in his “Refutation of Arguments in Support of Free Choice:”

\begin{quote}
We have to argue in one way about God or the will of God as preached, revealed, offered, and worshipped, and in another way about God as he is not preached, not revealed, not offered, not worshipped. To the extent, therefore, that God hides himself and wills to be unknown to us, it is no business of ours... God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor has he willed that we should have anything to do with him.\footnote{Ibid., 200-201.}
\end{quote}

In effect—although Luther would acknowledge (along with the rest of the Christian tradition) that a portion of God’s will became legible to us in the “Word, through which [God] offers himself to us,” that is to say, the revea-
tion of Jesus Christ—revelation does not exhaust the nature of the Father. On the contrary, in Luther’s pietistic picture, the revelation of God comes concomitant with the secret nature of God—God “as he is in his own nature and majesty” where “nothing can be exalted, but all things are under his mighty hand.”

In essence, through Lutheran theology, we get a kind of Christian version of pre-Socratic ἀλήθεια. In Luther’s view, all “unhiddenness” implies a “hiddenness”—all revelation implies that which has not been disclosed. It is, therefore, the great mistake of humanists to assume that God’s will is completely intelligible or actionable. On the contrary, “God does many things that he does not disclose to us in his word; he also wills many things which he does not disclose himself as willing in his word.”

God’s power exceeds His disclosure to creation.

Ultimately, then, Luther seems to leverage at least two distinct attacks on Erasmus’ humanism. On the one hand, he critiques the notion that human beings have the power to will goodness and thus to will their own salvation. And, on the other, he insists that even knowing how to will goodness—or at least, absolute goodness in accordance with God’s will—is impossible. In Luther’s view, the very nature of the “good” (in the sense of the absolute) is only partially revealed. To try and pursue it as one would pursue absolute correctness of vision is a simple categorical mistake.

Where, then, does Luther leave us? As it turns out, not quite as adrift as Heidegger. Although Luther, like Heidegger, insists on the ultimate impotence of the human will, he does not shy away from prescribing and proscribing certain activity. On the contrary, Luther insists that while all truth is partial and incomplete, we should nevertheless attend to that truth which has been disclosed: particularly, the truth of scripture. As he emphasizes at the very beginning of his treatise, although “in God there are many things hidden, of which we are ignorant,” it is ridiculous to assume that “in Scripture there are some things abstruse, and everything is not plain.” Just the opposite: the one thing that humanity can do for itself is engage with scripture, waiting for the Holy Spirit to possess them and imbue their reading with theological and existential instruction.

Therefore, we might reasonably argue that Luther both extends and

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23 Ibid., 201.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 110.
27 Ibid., 110.
expands a version of pre-Socratic ἀλήθεια. Although Lutheran theology mimics the formal characteristics of Heidegger’s primeval truth, it nevertheless adds an external metric or standard of disclosure, which all truth must be grounded within—God’s twofold revelation of scripture and the life of Jesus Christ.

Kierkegaard, Abraham and Subjective Truth

While Luther certainly anticipates the general form of Heideggerian truth, his account remains radically embedded in the theological tradition. Quite simply, he fails to give a generalized account of what “revelation” or the “Spirit” might look like concretely or universally. Consequently, while Luther certainly provides one genealogical antecedent for Heidegger, he alone does not give us the whole story.

For that, we will need to dig into the work of Danish existentialist and “poet penitent,” Søren Kierkegaard, a Lutheran Christian in his own right, and one of the most direct and profound influences on Heidegger’s thinking. In particular, where Kierkegaard preserves the Lutheran distinction between the “hidden” and the “unhidden,” he does not, at least in the pseudonymous works, restrict that claim to scriptural exegesis or an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. Instead, through his own existential analytic, Kierkegaard (paradoxically and unintentionally) abstracts Lutheran theology to the realm of human inter-relation and communication: an abstraction Heidegger takes up wholeheartedly in his later, post-Christian project.

Perhaps the clearest example of this comes about in Kierkegaard’s (or pseudonym Johannes de Silentio’s) Fear and Trembling, a text which takes as its starting point the Biblical sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. Indeed, as Kierkegaard puts it at the beginning of his exegesis, the central feature of that story is its stark portrait of Abraham:

28 However, for Luther, that disclosure remains necessarily outside of human control. Indeed, if we were to read the scripture according to “Reason,” we’d be as bad off as Erasmus: “interpreting the Scriptures of God by [Reason’s] own inferences and syllogisms and turn[ing] them in any direction [Reason] pleases” (Luther 184). Instead, humanity must understand the Word of God in light of the Spirit, for “no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God” (Luther 112). Scriptural exegesis, then, becomes both an ethical imperative and an active impossibility of the will: a task every human being ought to take up, and one which, paradoxically, exists wholly outside of the domain of self-determination and intentionality.
Abraham had faith and did not doubt; he believed the preposterous. If Abraham had doubted, then he would have done something else, something great and glorious, for how could Abraham do anything else but what is great and glorious! He would have gone to Mount Moriah, he would have split the firewood, lit the fire, drawn the knife... He would have thrust the knife into his own breast. He would have been admired in the world, and his name would never be forgotten; but it is one thing to be admired and another to become a guiding star that saves the anguished.29

In other words, Abraham could have been great even if he rejected the sacrifice—if he viewed God’s demand as a test and refused to murder his son. And yet, for Kierkegaard, Abraham’s true greatness exists in the fact that he willingly accepts God’s challenge—that he has faith not for a future life or a new covenant, but a “faith specifically for this life—faith that he would grow old in this country, be honored among the people, blessed by posterity, and unforgettable in Isaac, the most precious thing in this life.”30 For Kierkegaard, Abraham’s movement is not just one of faith, but of paradox. His significance resides in his ability to believe the impossible—that he will both sacrifice Isaac, and that Isaac will become his worldly heir.

Already, we can see the structure of Lutheran pietism creeping into Kierkegaard’s picture. Indeed, the central quality of faith, for Kierkegaard is a kind of “hiddenness.” As he puts it a few pages later: “I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham’s life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth. I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very same instant I become paralyzed.”31 For the pseudonymous Kierkegaard, understanding Abraham—like understanding God for Luther—is a structural impossibility. “I cannot think myself into Abraham... when I reach that eminence, I sink down, for what is offered me is a paradox.”32 The very nature of faith remains inaccessible to rational cogitation.

30 Ibid., 20.
31 Ibid., 33.
32 Ibid.
And yet, while the specific psychology of Abraham’s sacrifice might remain unintelligible to Kierkegaard, the notion of unintelligibility writ large operates slightly differently in his work than it does in “On the Bondage of the Will.” After all, the “hiddenness” Luther seems most worried about is ontological—part of God’s hidden plan, which must remain closed off from us as a function of the metaphysical makeup of reality. In the case of Kierkegaard, however, unintelligibility takes on a more existential and communicative quality. As he describes at the very outset of Problema III: “The single individual, qualified as immediate, sensate, and psychical, is the hidden. Thus his ethical task is to work himself out of his hiddenness and to become disclosed in the universal. Every time he desires to remain in the hidden, he trespasses and is immersed in spiritual trial from which he can emerge only by disclosing himself.”33 In other words, the very essence of individuality is a kind of hiddenness. Moreover, it is the essential purpose of civilized society to translate individual hiddenness into universal disclosure—to transform the interior into the exterior.

However, while Kierkegaard seems to accept a notion of truth as the interplay between the hidden and the unhidden,34 he does not accept the Hegelian, humanist doctrine: that all hiddenness should be overcome and forced into the light of public life. Just the opposite: in Kierkegaard’s view, “despite the rigorousness with which ethics demands disclosure, it cannot be denied that secrecy and silence make a man great simply because they are qualifications of inwardness.”35 More plainly: the very highest stages of human life require a kind of hiddenness and incommensurability—the awareness of a paradox that cannot be translated into the ethical and universal.

Consequently, in Kierkegaard’s Fear and Trembling, we get an important development of Luther’s notion of “hiddenness” and “unhiddenness.” In particular, rather than proposing a metaphysical world-picture wherein portions of God’s plan remain opaque, Kierkegaard implies that the tension between disclosure and revelation can take place on a worldly—and therefore, not necessarily supernatural—scale. In effect, while Kierkegaard strongly rejects the Platonic idea that all “hiddenness” can or should be overcome, he does not propose an alternate “ontotheological” metaphysics.

We can see, then, how Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous corpus might lay the groundwork for Heidegger’s account of ἀλήθεια. In Kierkegaard’s work, there is not only a strong emphasis on the dynamic interplay of the

33 Ibid., 82.
34 Particularly, in his three “stages of life”: the aesthetic, ethical, and religious.
35 Ibid., 88.
“hidden” and the “unhidden,” but resources for a more general existential analytic. Unlike Luther, who grounds all truth and goodness in the twin revelations of scripture and Christ, Kierkegaard’s more liberal notion of “subjective truth”\textsuperscript{36} emphasizes those individual experiences that remain in-commensurable and incommunicable between human beings. In Kierkegaard, then, Heidegger gets both an anti-humanism, and the auspices of a post-Christianity; by de-emphasizing the theological metaphysics of the unhidden versus revealed will of God, and re-emphasizing the procedural, contentless interplay between the concealed and revealed, Kierkegaard is able to maintain the structure of \textgreek{αλήθεια}, without necessarily tethering the source of truth to God’s will. Thus—wholly inadvertently—Kierkegaard’s \textit{Fear and Trembling} sets the stage for the more general, anti-metaphysical analytic Heidegger will take up a century later—the one that will consume his work after the \textit{Kehre} in 1930.

At least, that is one way \textit{Fear and Trembling} might be read. And yet, despite the notable distance from Luther’s God-language, it nevertheless remains clear that truth and goodness, in Kierkegaard’s picture, really have some definite content. Indeed, as Kierkegaard explains later in \textit{Problema III}, in order for “hiddenness” to be higher than the ethical—or, in order to justify the teleological suspension of the ethical—the silence of the individual must not “be due to [the individual] wanting to place himself as the single individual in an absolute relation to the universal but to his having been placed in an absolute relation to the absolute.”\textsuperscript{37} Phrased differently: for the claims and exigencies of a certain situation to become religious—and therefore warrant the subversion of the “ethical” or the “unhidden”—they must be made in relation to some kind of permanent, indelible other.

Moreover, as Kierkegaard insists later in that section, the absolute is not itself without normative charge. On the contrary, as he illustrates in the case of Agnes and the merman, an unintelligible and wholly individual response to the absolute can itself be negative and “demonic.” For instance, if a merman were to try and make his betrothed hate and despise him for her “own good”—if he were to “endeavor to incite all the dark passions in her, to belittle her, to ridicule her, to make her love ludicrous, and, if possible, to arouse her pride”—he would not be acting in accordance with Abraham and the model he sets forth as the “Knight of Faith.”\textsuperscript{38} Just the opposite: while “the demonic has the same quality as the divine, namely, that the single indi-


\textsuperscript{37} Kierkegaard, \textit{Fear and Trembling}, 93.
individual is able to enter into an absolute relation to it... [the demonic] is the counterpart to that paradox of which we speak,” an incommensurability that multiplies external suffering, rather than collapses or dissolves it. 39

While Kierkegaard certainly generalizes and “existentializes” Luther’s notion of hiddenness and unhiddenness, he does not proceed in quite the formalist, anti-metaphysical way that Heidegger might want. On the contrary, by emphasizing the absolute other as the criterion for the religious life, Kierkegaard establishes a standard for “truth” and “goodness” that transcends the structural interplay between unhiddenness and hiddenness. Kierkegaard does not succumb either to Platonic/Hegelian humanism, or to the purely formal αληθεια Heidegger finds in the pre-Socratics. Instead, he sets down a kind of “third path” between Lutheran pietism and abstract existential analysis.

**Bonhoeffer, Christ and Christian Ethics**

The question remains: where does that “third path” end up—and what kind of workable, practical system of ethics does it arrive at? Enter Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor whose own *Ethics* offers both a culmination to Lutheran ethical reflection and an important alternative to Heidegger’s pure ontology.

Unlike the pseudonymous Kierkegaard, who eschewed some of the language of Christianity for a more generalized analysis of interiority and exteriority, Bonhoeffer returns to the essential categories of Christ and salvation. Indeed, as he writes at the beginning of one of his essays, “Christ, Reality, and Good:”

> Those who wish even to focus on the problem of a Christian ethic are faced with an outrageous demand—from the outset they must give up, the very two questions that led them to deal with the ethical problem: ‘How can I be good?’ and ‘How can I do something good?’ Instead they must ask the wholly other, completely different question: what is the will of God? 40

Unlike *Fear and Trembling*, which shied away from the more dogmatic aspects of Christian vocabulary, Bonhoeffer insists that asking questions about ethics

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38 Ibid., 96.
39 Ibid., 97.
requires reflection on God and His revelation. As he puts it just a few pages later, “the source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one’s own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ.”

Christ, as a manifestation of God’s will, is the necessary centerpiece of our earthly questions about truth and the good—indeed, by Bonhoeffer’s lights, there is not even another way to frame the issue.

Superficially, it might seem like Bonhoeffer merely returns to the metaphysical picture painted by Luther. As he stalwartly insists, the true and the good are inextricably linked to God and God’s revelation: “The will of God, as it was revealed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, embraces the whole of reality.” As such, the very idea that Bonhoeffer “existentializes” Lutheran pietism—or brings it into conversation with Heideggerian ἀλήθεια—seems straightforwardly incorrect. If anything, Bonhoeffer embraces a kind of Christian Platonism: where everything in God’s will is revealed, and the sole purpose of humanity is to uncover or manifest His divine decree.

And yet, while Bonhoeffer certainly insists on the supremacy of God’s dominion, he does not do so in the classic, humanist mode we might expect. On the contrary, for Bonhoeffer—as for Kierkegaard and Luther before him—binaries of the “unhidden” and the “hidden” remain essential. The qualitative difference is that, in this pastoral project, these binaries can be overcome through a relation to Christ.

Take Bonhoeffer’s explication of this point at the center of “History and the Good [2]:”

‘I am the life’—this is the word, the revelation, the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The statement that our life is outside ourselves and in Jesus Christ is in no way the result of our own self-understanding. Instead, it is a claim that encounters us from outside, which we either believe or contradict... In this word of Jesus Christ we thus hear the No spoken over our life, which is not life, or rather, is life only in the sense that even in our contradiction we actually still live from the life called Jesus Christ, the life that is the origin, essence, and goal of all life and our life. The No spoken over our fallen life means that it cannot become the life that is Jesus Christ without its own annihilation and death.

41 Ibid., 49.
42 Ibid., 75.
Like Heidegger, Bonhoeffer sees the process of truth as a dynamic conflict: this time, between the “Yes” of Christ—life in its “origin, essence and goal”—and the “No” of sinful or fallen existence. Moreover, like Heidegger, the advent of Bonhoefferian truth is “in no way the result of our own self-understanding.” Instead, truth “encounters us from the outside”—it imposes itself upon humankind, fully outside of our willed control.

However, crucially, the nature of Bonhoeffer’s truth is not just, as it was for the pre-Socratics, the tension between good and bad or the hidden and the unhidden. Instead, for Bonhoeffer:

[B]y killing us, the No becomes a hidden Yes to a new life, to the life that is Jesus Christ. Christ is the life that we cannot give ourselves, but which comes to us completely from the outside, completely from beyond ourselves... This new life is not present other than hidden under the mark of death, of the No. We now live stretched between the No and the Yes.

In Bonhoeffer, then, the issue of truth is not merely ontological, but necessarily religious. As in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the domain of conflict between the “unhidden” and “hidden” lies in human existence. But, unlike in Kierkegaard and Heidegger, this conflict becomes resolved through Jesus Christ. Phrased differently: Bonhoeffer puts forth a new kind of Christian anti-humanism—one where the paradoxes of the “No” and “Yes” of hiddenness and unhiddenness are resolved through an existential relation to Jesus. As he puts it just a few lines later in the same essay: “We can no longer speak about our life other than in... relation to Jesus Christ”—the will of God can only be fully revealed by the synthesis of the absolute affirmation and negation together, in one, paradoxical unity.

In a sense, then, Bonhoeffer’s Ethics both concludes and transforms an

43 Ibid., 250-251.
44 Ibid., 251.
45 At least, unlike in Fear and Trembling, Bonhoeffer’s project does bear striking similarity to the thinking Kierkegaard will do in the “Climacus” works, “Philosophical Fragments” and “Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments,” as well as in the veronymous corpus.
46 Ibid., 251.
important part of the Lutheran tradition. Like Luther, Bonhoeffer insists on
the dynamic interplay between the “hidden” and the “unhidden”—and,
especially, the way it occurs outside of human will and intentionality. Further-
more, like Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer sees this truth coming about relationally—in
the form of the intersubjective community, since “God’s community
with the world... has already been accomplished in Jesus Christ” and the
community formed by a loving, Christian relationship is the essential unit of
religious existence.\textsuperscript{47}

However, unlike Heidegger, or the secular reading of Kierkegaard,
Bonhoeffer does not assume truth comes merely from the “unhidden”
winning itself out against the “hidden.” On the contrary, the central assump-
tion of Bonhoefferian Christianity is that union with Christ has profound
ontological, as well as temporal, implications. As Bonhoeffer explains:
“Vicarious representative action and therefore responsibility is possible only
in completely devoting one’s own life to another person. Only those who are
selfless live responsibly, which means that only selfless people truly live.”\textsuperscript{48} In
other words, the synthesis provided by Christ—between sinful human will
and revealed divine will—requires a kind of loving attitude towards the
world. In Bonheoffe’s language, “Human beings live responsibly where the
divine Yes and the divine No become one within them.”\textsuperscript{49} Unity with Christ
requires (though it might precede) good works.

Consequently, while we might fairly call Bonhoeffer’s theology
“existential,” it is not existential in the purely formal, value-neutral sense of
Heidegger’s analytic of \textit{Dasein}. On the contrary, by framing his
theological reflection as a function of humanity’s relation to reality—and by
spelling out the effects that a synthesis with Christ might have on our ac-
tions—Bonhoeffer evades both the empty, contentless fate of \textit{άλήθεια} and
the metaphysical reduction of Lutheranism. Phrased differently: Bonhoeffer
provides an effective, anti-humanist alternative to the story Heidegger tells
about truth—a revised narrative that sees the criterion of the good and the
true as the individual human being, in loving relation to Christ and the
Christian community.

\textbf{Conclusions: The Future of Anti-Humanism?}

While the Lutheran tradition certainly provides an alternative genealogy

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 241.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 259.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
to Heideggerian \(\alpha\lambda\theta\varepsilon\alpha\), and might even offer an ethical supplement to the pure ontology of Heidegger’s essays after the *Kehre*, it is unclear what general conclusions we might reach about the future of Heideggerian anti-humanism. After all, while Bonhoeffer provides an authentic substitute for much of Heidegger’s thinking, he still relies heavily on the Christian language (if not, precisely, the Christian metaphysics) of Luther and Protestantism. Indeed, the very saving intervention of Bonhoeffer is religious: he changes the pure formalism of Heidegger’s “hiddenness” and “unhiddenness” into a Christian, relational model of “life in Christ” versus “life in sin” or “death.” Put differently: in order for Heidegger’s post-Christian ontology to merge with an ethics, it requires (at least in this case) the saving intercession of something like Bonhoeffer’s Christian existentialism.

Should we assume, then, that any sort of post-Christian or atheistic anti-humanism is impossible? That accepting something “given” outside of a “giver” is a contradiction in terms? Is the best we can get, from Heideggerian ontology, a kind of milquetoast “responsiveness to the exigencies of the situation,” a responsiveness that might involve joining the Nazi party and affirming Hitler’s plebiscite?

Not necessarily. Instead, we might settle for a much narrower and more conservative claim: in order for an ontology of \(\alpha\lambda\theta\varepsilon\alpha\) to maintain some ethical content, it must include reference to some particular, external “other.” That is not, of course, to say that this “other” must be an absolute, ahistorical, Kantian judge of good and evil—a categorical imperative, or absolute moral law that definitively sorts the wheat from the chaff. Even Bonhoeffer will insist that “the question of the good must not be narrowed to investigating the relation of actions to their motives, or their consequences, measuring them by a ready made ethical standard [Emphasis Mine].” Rather, we propose that the dynamic interplay between the “unhidden” and the “hidden,” between the “true” and the “false,” between the “good” and the “evil,” must have, as its source and criteria, something other than the self-governed individual—something both responsive to historical circumstances and outside the ken of solipsistic interiority.

Ultimately, we might say that the form of our argument mirrors the insight of another great anti-humanist, Blaise Pascal. As that French thinker wrote in 1654: “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certitude. Certitude.

50 Bonhoeffer, 52.

51 In fact, this philosophical position is taken up (at least partially) by one of Heidegger’s own disciples: Emmanuel Levinas.
Feeling. Joy. Peace. God of Jesus Christ.” For theological reflection to have meaning, it must not come from the purely abstract constructions of the philosophers. Instead, meaningful ethics and ontology require the saving grace of a particular God—the “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, [and] God of Jacob.” For our purposes, in order for post-Christian ethics to work, they must contain reference to some specific other—a historical, contextual, and embodied alterity, that both grounds and grades ethical behavior.

Consequently, while—as Heidegger and Nietzsche predict—the time of the Christian God may have come to an end, any workable system of anti-humanist ethics requires the intervention of some other other: a grounding source that provides orientation and justification for goodness and truth. Indeed, as Heidegger himself presciently predicts, human will, alone, will not do the trick. Instead—paradoxically but necessarily—in a post-Christian world: “only a God can save us.”


TALKING ABOUT SPACE: INTERSUBJECTIVE LINGUISTIC PRACTICES AND THE MATERIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NORMS

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Introduction

The portraiture displayed in the hallowed halls of many theological institutions has historically been fairly monochromatic—one manner in which racism inscribes itself into the physicality of a place. Such conditions are certainly not universal, but they are common and constitute one way in which walking through common and public spaces as a black or brown student can involve experiences of non-recognition not encountered by white members of the community. Such experiences of non-recognition are the product of social practices and material culture that define the community through recognition of each other as competent users of norms. There have been a number of initiatives to change such spaces, including attempts to correct historical blindness to the contributions of black and brown scholars in these institutions, as well as aspirational attempts to provide a setting which can more effectively inspire a wider array of students. More broadly there has been a growing movement to rename buildings that memorialize proponents of racism, as well as the removal of many public statues which celebrate members of the Confederate military. Are these attempts useful? How are norms inscribed in space, and reinscribed in psyches? This essay attempts to tease out the relationship between norms, language and material space.

In his Philosophical Investigations, Ludwig Wittgenstein lays the groundwork...
for accounts of ethics that look to language use for insight into ethical life. Within this vein, Kevin Hector’s 2011 work, *Theology without Metaphysics*, articulates a useful means of immanent critique of non-recognitive social practices—an approach institutions might find helpful for reshaping those social practices which give rise to experiences of non-recognition for black and brown students. However, to employ Hector’s linguistic project, further work is necessary in order to make sense of the physical experience of black and brown students walking through halls and common spaces when large portraits of the school’s beloved, historic, and entirely white predecessors line the walls. Making the norms of non-recognition in this experience explicit will require attending to the means by which norms are constructed in space. Here, neo-Marxist constructions of space offer a framework for articulating the material embedding of norms, a work taken up by urban sociologist Sharon Zukin in her 1995 work, *The Cultures of Cities*. The construction of space occupies many urban geographers and sociologists working in the traditions of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. However, Zukin’s writing at the intersection of material culture, spatial construction, and civic virtues presents an especially vivid example of the formation of norms and ideals within and by actual public spaces in New York City. Layering Zukin’s articulation of space onto Hector’s means of immanent critique deepens Hector’s ability to make explicit a greater range of non-recognitive practices. In this way, attending to embodied social practices in all of their situated material reality reveals more fully and clearly the non-recognitive social practices that exist in space and allows these practices to be made explicit in linguistic concepts, where they might otherwise go on “in the same way.”

**Intersubjective Linguistic Practices**

Hector terms his account “broadly Schleiermacherian-pragmatist” and by this he signals the way norms arise through recognitive linguistic practices, the implicit nature of norms, and the means of evaluating such norms. A Wittgensteinian anti-metaphysical account of language and an Hegelian form of recognition underpin Hector’s project, allowing concepts to arise and gain credence through intersubjective practices of recognition without recourse to

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4 Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 275.
metaphysical grounding.⁵ “Novelty,” on this account, is “the rule in language use rather than the exception,”⁶ which is to say that norms arising through intersubjective practices have one foot in precedent and one moving beyond it,⁷ constituting what Hector calls a normative trajectory. This is worth digesting a bit before moving on to the means of immanent critique.

For Hector, norms arise through recognitive processes whereby one assesses the use of a concept and admits it as authoritative by reciprocally using the concept “in the same way.”⁸ Consider the following scenario of teaching my youngest daughter the concept of a couch. As she is learning to speak, my daughter mimics the names my wife and I give to things in our house, though she does not understand that the thing in our house is named as one instance of a larger concept. So she might be able to point to the couch in our house with which she is familiar, though if we asked her to go sit on the couch at a friend’s house, she may not be able to identify which piece of furniture in the room is a couch. Neither has she yet grasped the norms of behavior lodged in the concept of a couch (couches are for sitting, not for biting, not for jumping on, not for coloring, etc.). She learns the concept of a couch by looking to my wife and I as authoritative concept users, recognizing our use of the concept as correct, and subjecting her own uses to the norms we employ. At some point (soon, we hope!), my daughter will grasp the concept of a couch and be able to go on in the same way, naming any couch she sees and interacting with couches in a manner appropriate to the norms of the concept. She will continue to look to authoritative concept users to validate her own use until she recognizes herself as such an authority.

Note that when she begins to assert her own uses as authoritative, she will be using the concept for many couches which have never been labeled for her by another concept user; going on in the same way is both to look back to authoritative precedents and an act of innovation to apply the concept in new situations. As a competent concept user, each time she uses the concept of a couch she asserts her own use as authoritative; that is, she puts her concept use out there as an instance of a norm that makes a claim on other concept users. To the extent that her concept use is recognized by oth-

⁵ In this essay I deal with one aspect of Hector’s broader project, which claims that antimetaphysical language is appropriate for use in theology.
⁶ Ibid., 40.
⁷ Ibid., 256-58.
⁸ Hector’s extended treatment of “the normative pragmatics of ordinary concept use” is to be found on pages 52-72, where he uses the example of teaching his son the concept of heat on pages 60-61.
er concept users, her use becomes part of the normative trajectory of the concept, and she becomes a member of the normative community.

The example of my young daughter learning a concept is illustrative of Hector’s account of the “normative pragmatics of ordinary concept use.”

Implicit, everyday practices, rather than metaphysical foundations, form the norms and concepts that allow individuals to meaningfully act. When individuals use concepts, they intend their use to go on in the same way as precedent uses, even as every performance is, in some small way, novel. This is as true for couches and tables as it is for abuse, kindness, lying, friendship, and cheating. Describing an experience as abuse authorizes precedent uses of the concept, recognizing the performers of those precedents as authoritative concept users. Making such judgments, one situates oneself within a normative community of concept users where norms continually circulate.

Individuals respond to circumstances prompting others to perceive such responses as correct and worthy of imitation (or not) such that these responses become custom (or not). Going on in the same way, therefore, “cannot be determined in advance. An expression counts as carrying on a normative trajectory… not because it was prospectively predicable, but because it is retrospectively recognizable as such.” In this manner, selection of precedents and novel application shape the normative trajectory of a concept within a community.

Performances and judgments that make up the normative trajectory operate implicitly within a community at the level of “attunement,” that is, a non-inferential and norm-laden feel for one’s circumstances (what Schleiermacher terms Gefühl). Hector notes, “we generally treat a concept use as correct by not making explicit our recognitive attitude toward it.” Once my daughter has matured as a concept user, she will not think about the definition of a couch, nor will my wife or I likely ever need to correct or even mention the manner in which she uses the concept of a couch. However, if she were to say: “couch,” when referring to a bar stool, we would immediately notice something was off, and it would thus become remarkable. That is, only at the point where there appears a disjuncture between a normative tra-
jectory and a concept use does the norm become explicit such that the improper use of a concept can be critiqued.

With the above framework in hand, we turn to consider how immanent critique of unjust social practices becomes possible through making norms explicit. Hector treats accounts of injustice and oppression as social practices of non-recognition, that is, the silencing of persons whereby they are not recognized as competent concept users.\textsuperscript{17} Non-recognition of this sort places one outside the community of concept users, creating an Us/Them relationship, since a community is constituted through the recognition of each other’s concept use.\textsuperscript{18} Yet such norms feel natural and right to those within the community attuned to such normative practices, such that making non-inferential norms explicit and making judgments against them presents a challenge.

Consider the traditional norm once prevalent within academic communities that “rigorous, academically excellent scholarship is always universal,” produced from a position of “disinterested objectivity.”\textsuperscript{19} Liberationists, feminists and womanists experienced this norm of universality as disrespect. Katie Cannon, for example, pointed to the implicit non-recognitive nature of this universality, specifically within the field of ethics and biblical interpretation.

The accepted canonical methods of moral reasoning contain deeply hidden biases that make it exceedingly difficult to turn them to the service of the best interest of Black women. Universality does not include the Black female experience.\textsuperscript{20}

The concept of universality at stake, as was traditionally constructed within the academy, was non-recognitive toward Black women and existed as a non-inferential norm that “felt right” within the community. Attunement to this norm meant non-recognition could occur even within communities explicitly committed to promoting the causes of Black women. Hector states the problem as such:

\[B\]ecause norms circulate implicitly, at the level of non-inferential

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 266-67.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 123.
responsive dispositions (or ‘attunement’), and not just explicitly, it follows that one’s thinking and acting can be inflected with racism, sexism, classism, and so on, even if one does not realize it—indeed, even if one is strongly and explicitly opposed to racism, sexism, and classism.\textsuperscript{21}

The challenge to critiquing such norms is the challenge of making the norm explicit and determining a measure by which to call the norm unjust when the norm “feels right” within the community. That is, if norms are established and judged through the intersubjective practices of the community and an unjust norm is non-inferentially recognized within the community to carry on in the same way as the trajectory, what means does the community have to critique such norms?

Appeals to a foundation external to the normative community (e.g. scripture or natural law) provide one option for critique of norms to which the community is attuned. To be effective, these foundations must themselves stand above normative judgment and offer objective external means by which to measure the norms within the community.\textsuperscript{22} Yet, post-structuralists such as Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Butler provide effective critiques of such attempts to identify external grounds of judgment by calling attention to the “pervasiveness of the totalizing order and the consequent illusoriness of claims to critique that order from a point which transcends it.”\textsuperscript{23} That is, there seems no way to posit a foundation that is not itself subject to the norms of the community. Any means of applying such a foundation exposes its claims to the intersubjective practices of recognition within the community, and as such, fails to provide the external critique desired of it.

Certainly, this woefully brief criticism of ethical foundations does no justice to the broader argument between foundationalist and non-foundationalist ethics. Yet, even in this rough outline the utility of immanent critique is apparent. If norms necessarily operate within the intersubjective practices of a community, whether those norms are transcendent or arise within the community, it is important to be able to make judgments from within the intersubjective practices. On Hector’s account, the process of intersubjective recognition can provide a means by which critique

\textsuperscript{21} Hector, \textit{Theology without Metaphysics}, 277.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 249.
arises from inside these practices, initiated through experiences of disrespect. He quotes Axel Honneth to define disrespect as “a matter of disappointment or violation of normative expectations of society considered justified by those concerned.” Experiences of disrespect reveal “fissures” within patterns of non-recognition in a community. That is, when community social practices include unjust norms of non-recognition, experiences of disrespect make these perverse norms explicit by illuminating the distance between normative trajectories and social practices.

Consider if there existed a non-inferential recognitive practice of using proper titles rather than given names when addressing someone in conversation. If a woman noticed that male co-workers addressed her by her given name in conversation, this experience would both make the previously implicit norm of “proper titles as recognition” explicit and serve as an internal point from which to critique failures of the norm. Consider the more challenging case if another implicitly circulating norm provided sanction to the non-recognition of women. Together the norms could appear: “proper titles as recognition” and “men never use proper titles with women in the work-place.” In this case, we might not expect male co-workers’ failure to use proper titles with women to register as disrespect, since there was no disappointment of normative expectations. Yet disrespect might still be experienced and reveal a normative fissure in two ways. First, recognitive practices are rarely so uniform within society that disrespect of this sort could go completely unexperienced by those disrespected. Thus, women might become attuned to proper titles as recognition in other settings (relationships with other women, relationships with men outside of work, etc.) and come to feel the disrespect of the workplace practices as out of line by extension of this attunement. Second, the norm “proper titles as recognition” is not a static principle. Recall from above that normative trajectories are a continual process of innovation in conversation with past non-inferential recognitive events. As these trajectories have the ever-present potential to shift forward, “the norm implicit in these trajectories can outrun its current application, such that there can arise a kind of normative surplus by appeal to which one can criticize the prevailing order.”

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25 Ibid., 272.
26 Ibid., 275.
27 Ibid., 288.
28 Ibid., 281.
condition of expectation that women would receive this recognition even if other norms were working against it. The norm itself can fund questions like, “I receive this respect at home, why not here?” or “the men receive this respect, why not women?” such that the practice of non-recognition can be seen as unjust “by [its] own lights.”

Katie Cannon’s work presents a fascinating example of a time when this kind of immanent critique arose within a community. By making the norm of universality explicit, she revealed the fissure between the normative trajectory and the social practice—that is, between the ideal of objective relevancy to all viewpoints and the reality of the oppressive exclusion of viewpoints from the universal voice. Cannon experienced the gap between the ideal and the reality as disrespect to the expectation that norms of universality would include the experiences and viewpoints of Black women. Making the norm of universality explicit and revealing this fissure allowed Cannon to critique the norm “by its own lights.” Thus she suggested that being universal required attending to the specificity of communities, allowing the voices of oppressed minorities to speak from their experience rather than assume an abstract voice of objectivism that in fact masked the viewpoint of the dominant class.

Hector’s account of intersubjective practices of recognition thus provides both a helpful description of the formation of norms as well as a means to critique these norms from a position internal to the system. Yet, connecting his account to the experience of a black or brown student walking halls lined in all-white portraiture remains murky. How do norms arise materially in space and produce experiences of disrespect? Hector’s project focuses on linguistic practices, as his primary concern is to provide an account of anti-metaphysical theological discourse. To address how the norms inscribed in common spaces might enter linguistic practices, I turn to Sharon Zukin, for whom the material culture of cities is a powerful means of forming public virtues. Zukin thus provides language for attending to the situated material reality of non-recognitive social practices, enabling us to subject such practices to Hector’s immanent critique as they are made explicit.

The Material Construction of Norms

Zukin explores the social norms of Bryant Park’s material culture in her
work *The Culture of Cities*. Though the New York City site had seen varied public uses stretching back to the 17th century, in the 1930s Bryant Park was constructed as a contemplative space, walled-off from the noise and rush of the city. By the 1970s, however, the walls served instead as a barrier between office workers on the outside and crime and loitering on the inside.\(^{30}\) Powerful business interests in the community gained approval to “revitalize” the space and redesigned the park in the early 1990s, purposefully employing certain aesthetics aimed to keep out “undesirables.”\(^{31}\) The restoration corporation formed to revitalize the park did so by lowering the perimeter walls, opening sight-lines throughout the park, clearing trash, subsidizing certain forms of entertainment, and incorporating specific forms of art and a particular food culture. The effort was to attract “normal users” such that “others” were displaced and the park was made safer for middle-class patrons: what Zukin refers to as “pacification by cappuccino.”\(^{32}\) At the time of Zukin’s writing (1995), noontime on a nice day found Bryant Park teeming with mostly white middle class office workers eating lunch, while minority groups were pushed to the park’s periphery.\(^{33}\)

Bryant Park inculcates certain public cultural norms by dint of being a public space. The material culture of space acts as “a source of images and memories, symboliz[ing] ‘who belongs’ in specific places”\(^{34}\) and providing “an implicit code of inclusion and exclusion.”\(^{35}\) “The cultural strategies that have been chosen to revitalize Bryant Park carry with them the implication of controlling diversity while re-creating a consumable vision of civility.”\(^{36}\) The power dynamics at play when private business interests dictate civic virtues through the construction and control of public space are rightly concerning to Zukin. The ability of private interests to construct space in this manner allows these interests to remake public culture in their image and for their benefit. The civic virtues expressed are cleanliness and exclusivity rather than open access and public stewardship.\(^{37}\) These power dynamics push public spaces toward elitism, signaling just whom a society values.

Zukin’s work raises the specter of power dynamics and public virtues


\(^{31}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 31.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 32.
inscribed in space, and now we might consider Zukin’s description of Bryant Park in terms of intersubjective practices. Norms of “belonging” arise by a recognition process that takes cues from physical architecture and material culture. In the normative trajectory, aesthetics are an important repository of the implicit norms that get taken up in the intersubjective social practices of park-goers. Art and food choices that generally align with white-middle-class tastes signal who belongs in the space, and these signals are absorbed into intersubjective social practices as white-middle-class office workers fill the center of the park during lunch hours. “Attunement,” the non-inferential and norm-laden feel for one’s circumstances,38 is a product of intersubjective reciprocal use of concepts inscribed in the aesthetic construction of a space. These aesthetic constructions make outsiders of groups who do not fit the white-middle-class paradigm or share their tastes, creating implicitly circulating norms in public space and in public consciousness.

Attending to the ways in which our non-inferential responses are imbricated in material culture highlights just how hidden and resistant to change our patterns of non-recognition can be. Failing to do so has the effect of presenting intersubjective practices as more democratic than they actually are and veils the means by which power operates in space. Note some distinctions between norms embedded in intersubjective discursive practices and those embedded in space. In discursive practices, each voice is a concept user that exists within a normative trajectory. These trajectories as a whole are extremely powerful, acting as a reference for social practices, legitimating and delegitimating both disrespect and innovation, and providing the basis of recognition and non-recognition. Hector describes the manner in which some voices are not recognized or hold less weight than others within discursive practices;39 such unjust non-recognitive practices place the “unrecognized” outside the community of concept users.40 Yet intersubjective practices inscribed in space are inherently less democratic than intersubjective discursive practices. Voices within discursive practices might be more or less authoritative, but they do not carry beyond one’s immediate contacts except as they are reciprocally taken up by other concept users. Thus in discursive practices, norms gain force primarily through the ubiquity of their use. Zukin’s work reveals that constructed space propagates norms in a less democratic manner in two ways: first, the longevity of norms inscribed in space

38 Hector, Theology without Metaphysics, 78-79.
39 Ibid., 267-270.
40 Ibid., 67.
can outlast the normative trajectory that inscribed them, and second, constructors of norms inscribed in space have greater centralized authority over norms than members of a linguistic normative community. I will consider each of these in turn.

Norms inscribed in space have a tendency to stick around for a while. Constructed space and its material culture are hardly immutable; space can be de/reconstructed and normative communities might reinterpret material culture in ways that shift the norms associated with it. Yet space is less malleable than discourse and the possibility remains that space/material culture might continue to propagate static norms long after the normative trajectory has moved on. Space/material culture can enshrine one moment in the normative trajectory throughout its endurance and propagate these norms through intersubjective exchanges with those who encounter the space. The original intersubjective practices that stand behind norms enshrined in material culture may not even appear culpable given the normative context at the time of construction; the actors who originally enshrined the norms may well have been attuned to the normative trajectory of their time. Yet these constructions of space can continue to exert force on normative trajectories, causing experiences of disrespect for significant lengths of time.

The portraiture of common spaces provides an occasion of just such a case. Portraits hung over time often visibly enshrined cultural norms of white privilege. Despite progress in the normative trajectory at many institutions of higher education, the material culture of all-white portraiture continues to implicitly convey the norms of a bygone era. Members of the community collectively imbibe the ideals implicitly inscribed on the walls: “this is who we celebrate, this is what success looks like, this is who we are.” In such common spaces, as well as Bryant Park, one can feel Willie Jennings’ words resonating in the space:

Whiteness is a way of imagining the world moving around you, flowing around your body with you being at the center. Whiteness is a way of imagining the true, the good, and the beautiful configured around white bodies. Whiteness is a way of imagining oneself as the central facilitating reality of the world, the reality that makes sense of the world, that interprets, organizes, and narrates the world, and whiteness is having the power to realize and sustain that imagination.41

To the extent that these norms enshrined in the portraiture of common spaces continue to operate at the level of non-inferential responsive dispositions, they substantiate attunement to non-recognitive practices toward those who do not fit the racial image presented in the material culture.

Beyond extended duration, materially embedded social practices are less democratic than discursive practices as the constructor of space has more centralized authority over the norms. This is due to the distinct place of the constructor of space/material culture in reference to the normative community. Reciprocal acts of recognition constitute the normative community for Hector. That is, the community is continuously constructed “every time one recognizes certain others’ performances and judgments as authoritative over one’s own performances and judgments, and when these others in turn recognize the recognizer as one of them.”

Norms on this model arise through the intersubjective practices of members of the community, yet those outside the normative community (or those who were part of its distant past) might inscribe norms in space/material culture that are taken up into the intersubjective practices of the community. The construction of space/material culture is a performative act of asserting one’s concept use as normative: the constructor creates space/material culture embedded with norms and the space/material culture propagates these norms to those who interact with the space/material culture. Thus the subject-to-subject nature of intersubjective practices is broken, meaning that the relationship between the constructor of space/material culture and the normative community member is, in a certain respect, akin to the relationship between my daughter and I as she learns proper concept use. At this stage, I consider my performances authoritative without looking to my daughter for reciprocal recognition. While the constructor of public space does not hold the same level of authority over the normative community as I hold over my daughter, s/he does stand above the community and exert a disproportionate influence on the normative perceptions of the community.

This disproportionate influence is a product of the exclusive nature of property. Space is commodified and controlled in “property” through a highly regimented bureaucratic process, con-flated with the power of the state at every level. John Locke found sovereignty of the individual in the appropriation of space to one’s person by means of inscribing it with one’s labor, yet it seems the power/right to construct and inscribe space is continually con-

tested. Taxes, building codes, zoning ordinances, the act of deeding: each can be understood in some respect as vying for the control of the right to inscribe space. Likewise, squatting and graffiti can be understood as the usurpation of the authority to inscribe norms in space. The point here is that differential access to property determines whose voice might be heard as the power to embed norms within space is reserved for those who control property. It is this power to remake public culture according to the norms of the constructor that is so concerning to Zukin since the very fact that the space constructed is “public” means it is therefore definitive of a certain societal concept of normalcy.

Michel Foucault, in an essay of Discipline and Punish titled “The Means of Correct Training,” helpfully articulates the manner in which norms determined by a central authority are enforced through certain constructions of space, an account that corresponds in important ways to the reconstruction of Bryant Park. Foucault highlights the role of observation in the disciplining of norms, the “ideal model” of which is historically found in the military camp. These camps were constructed to exact specifications that allowed for maximum observation in order to enforce military discipline. “The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible.” Bryant Park is certainly no military camp, though observation is clearly used as a disciplinary technique that enforces a certain definition of the normal park user. Local business elites of the restoration corporation selected a certain group of normal park users by incorporating into the reconstruction cultural aesthetics (art, food, entertainment) in line with the non-inferential dispositions of the desired patrons. Park regulations surrounding issues of alcohol, rummaging in trash, sleeping on benches, setting up shelters, etc. further distinguish certain activities—and by extension, certain patrons—as acceptable within the park. This normalization is then disciplined by means of observation. Recall from above that the perimeter wall of the park was lowered during the reconstruction and sight lines were cleared within the park. The intent (and result) of

44 On the intrinsically unsettled nature of Lockean private property rights and their use on both sides of squatters debates, see Nicholas Blomley, Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property (New York: Routledge, 2003), 20-22.


46 Ibid.

47 For park rules see: http://www.bryantpark.org/plan-your-visit/rules.html
these changes was to open the space such that security personnel could more effectively monitor the space and patrons could observe each other. The hierarchical observation of security personnel, which consists in a mix of private guards hired by the restoration corporation and public officers, enforce park regulations and attendant definitions of normalcy.

The trouble here is not that certain aesthetics were employed to make the park a safer place; the trouble is doing so by purposefully designating a specific type of park goer as a public norm in a way meant to displace non-normal users rather than integrate a wider range of users. This was possible because of the disproportionate ability of local business elites to define and inscribe norms within a public space, effectively advancing their norms as public norms. The enforcement of these norms is, in some respects, explicit in the park: rules are posted and enforced by security personnel. Yet, to the extent that these rules and the physical construction of the park lead to the dominance of a certain type of user as normal, patrons imbibe the “public” norms of who is normal and valued in society and implicitly circulate these norms in intersubjective practices. The norms inscribed in the space of the park are in this way taken up/reinforced/perpetuated by park users. Given Zukin’s observation of the lunch crowd, the restoration corporation’s effort to displace non-normal users seems to have been quite effective.  

Conclusion

If space/material culture is imbricated in intersubjective practices that


49   In “The Means of Correct Training,” Foucault includes a fascinating and insightful description of the way disciplinary experts normalize: “In short, the art of punishing, in the regime of disciplinary power…brings five quite distinct operations into play: it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another, in terms of the following overall rule: that the rule be made to function as a minimum threshold, as an average to be respected, or as an optimum to which one must move…. It introduces through this “value-giving” measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define differences, the external frontier of the abnormal…. The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instance in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.” Though Foucault here is considering only hierarchical observation, we may wonder whether the same process might apply in the mutual observation of park goers, as they implicitly categorize who fits the normative park user and whether they themselves feel welcome in the park. Foucault, 195.
shape normative trajectories, if aesthetics are an important repository of the implicit norms that get taken up in intersubjective social practices, and if materially embedded patterns of deference are less democratic than discursive practices, it is important to be able to say so. Lacking the ability to describe the formation of normative trajectories in Bryant Park, or common space portraiture, we lose the power of immanent critique. Recall from above that experiences of disrespect within intersubjective practices reveal fissures within patterns of non-recognition.\(^{50}\) When norms of non-recognition “feel right,” experiences of disrespect make perverse norms explicit by illuminating the distance between normative trajectories and social practices.\(^{51}\) But to the extent that those messages continue to operate at the level of non-inferential responsive dispositions, they substantiate attunement to non-recognitive practices. The power of Hector’s model lies in stripping the natural feel from norms of non-recognition. Without language to make norms inscribed in space explicit, this emancipatory project loses its efficacy in regard to non-recognitive norms inscribed in space.

Casting Zukin’s description of Bryant Park in the language used by Hector is therefore an important exercise. Language-based accounts of intersubjective practices are necessary in their ability to make the norms of constructed space explicit, bringing space into discursive practices and subjecting it to critique. Spatial experiences of disrespect can indeed reveal fissures between normative trajectories and patterns of non-recognition as these experiences become linguistically conceptualized. Consider how the disrespect experienced by black and brown students in common spaces reveals the conceptual norms of non-recognition (norms such as “whiteness”) inscribed in the monochromatic nature of the portraiture. Linguistic emancipatory practices exploit these fissures to make the patterns of non-recognition explicit. But making it explicit is only a first step when the norms of non-recognition exist in space. (Re)construction of the space is needed in order to shift the norms enshrined in the space to align with current normative trajectories. Recent projects in many schools and institutions to diversify portraiture, rename buildings, and replace public statues are meaningful steps toward changing public norms inscribed in these spaces. Such acts are no panacea for historical racism; yet they can help disrupt implicit patterns of non-recognition experienced by black and brown students walking the halls, helping to make common spaces truly common.

\(^{50}\) Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 272.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 275.
Critical Spaces in Post-9/11 War Cinema


Importantly, these films attracted millions of viewers, and pushed the issues mentioned above to the forefront of public discourse. Nonetheless, despite criticizing U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, Hollywood did little to suppress its Orientalist fantasy. Consistent with most American war films, post-9/11 cinema predominately depicted Arabs and Muslims as violent, backward, and uncivilized.

This paper describes the intervention that post-9/11 films made in the history of American war cinema by situating them within the larger genealogy of the genre. Beginning in World War II, I document Hollywood’s largely cooperative relationship with the U.S. Government to contextualize the extent to which post-9/11 war films broke from cinematic traditions. I then evaluate four major films—Charlie Wilson’s War, The Hurt Locker, Zero Dark Thirty, and American Sniper —against the standards that emerged in the
majority of preceding war films. This comparison finds that post-9/11 cinema differed from its predecessors in that it criticized U.S. policy in the Middle East during conflict, but shows that most of the mainstream films rarely afforded Arab actors a voice and split Muslims into a sharp binary of good and evil. In the conclusion, I examine the effects of this phenomenon, and contend that maintaining Orientalist tropes prohibits the film industry from truly creating critical spaces.

“Reel” Power: Censorship and Support

Throughout American cinematic history, Hollywood has maintained a close relationship with the United States Government. This relationship was especially prominent during wartime. Long recognized as an effective tool for attracting mass audiences and shaping public thought, government agencies have continually drawn on the big screen for rallying Americans to support war efforts. Government involvement in the industry has ranged from reading scripts to providing aircrafts; it has been present in nearly every major Hollywood production of American wars. As early as World War II, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) asserted that “the motion picture industry is beginning to be recognized as one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, influence upon the minds and culture, not only of the people of the United States, but of the entire world.”1 Articulating a similar view, the newly-formed Office of War Information observed “the potency of the motion picture as a means of communicating historical and political material in a dramatic way,” and added that the cinema, “answers the propaganda lies of the Axis and its sympathizers with the most powerful propaganda of all: the truth.”2 The government’s staunch belief in the power of the cinema to mobilize Americans was so deep that it led to an entangled relationship between Hollywood and the federal government for decades to come.

This entanglement resulted in mass censorship and private investigations in the film industry. Despite President Roosevelt’s declaration that he wanted no censorship in Hollywood, and that, “the motion picture industry should remain free,” the federal government created the Office of War Information and the Bureau of Motion Pictures to oversee Hollywood’s

scripts. In 1942, the latter agency released a manual for the film industry which suggested that moviemakers consider the question: “Will this picture help to win the war?” before producing a film.³ Of course, this manual was no mere suggestion, as the government had imprisoned at least one director in World War I for unfavorable depictions of British soldiers in a film on the Revolutionary War.⁴ In addition to these outright examples of censorship, the FBI was systematically investigating Hollywood at the time, citing its fear that the motion picture would be used for enemy propaganda. The Bureau went as far as infiltrating sets—with agents occasionally even appearing in films—to gather intelligence about possible enemies of the state in Hollywood.

These collective governmental actions resulted in a film industry that was wary to dissent from state interests. Unsurprisingly, then, Hollywood’s World War II productions unanimously supported the United States, and championed its allies as defenders of freedom. Shifting geo-politics created a major problem for the American Government and Hollywood following the end of World War II. Nazism had fallen, and the United States had a new enemy—communism. This new reality proved troublesome given the government’s requirement that the film industry depicts its allies favorably during wartime. Just several years before, the Office of War Information had championed Mission to Moscow (1943), a film that depicted the Soviet Union positively, as “a high point in the picture [that] should do much to bring understanding of Soviet international policy in the past years, and dispel the fears which many honest persons have felt with regard to our alliance with Russia.”⁵ Anxious to rewrite its positive depictions of the Soviets, Hollywood—with the help of agencies ranging from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Department of Defense (DOD)—embarked on a nearly forty-year-long campaign of demonizing the Soviet Union, and more broadly, communism.⁶ This campaign resulted in a wave of films that described the Soviet Union as a formidable enemy set on destroying democracy.

During this long stretch in American cinema, the Vietnam War came and went with hardly any attention. This silence was related to the

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⁶ For a detailed account of this history, see Tony Shaw, Hollywood’s Cold War (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1-8.
unpopularity of the war, but marked an important development in American war films—the industry’s reluctance to serve as a conduit of government interests. Simon Philpott writes, “Despite the US prosecuting a war in Vietnam for well over a decade, it was not until after its final withdrawal that fictional films about it began processing the conflict in the cultural imaginary.” Philpott acknowledges that “documentaries that interrogated the political assumptions underlying the involvement of the US” existed, but that “the war itself remained largely untouched by the mainstream US film industry.”

One exception to this trend was the 1968 film, *The Green Berets*, starring Ray Kellogg and John Wayne, but it was characteristically supportive of U.S. involvement in the war. This film, like most of the war films preceding it, was consulted by the U.S. Army and directed to make critical changes to the plot. In fact, so close was the relationship between the directors and the Army that the latter used some of the film-sets after production for “training troops destined for Vietnam.” It was not until five years after the conflict ended that Hollywood produced critical fictionalized accounts of the war. Hollywood’s silence during conflict highlighted the extent to which the film industry would cooperate with state interests, while also showing it would not release films that were unlikely to draw in viewers.

Unable to predict the next shift in geo-politics, Hollywood and the United States Government dug themselves into a hole once again during the late 1980s. As the Cold War neared to an end, Hollywood produced dramatized accounts of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the same way that directors in the 1930s and 40s depicted the Soviet Union as heroes in the war against the Axis Powers, Hollywood championed the Afghan mujabideen as brave freedom fighters against the encroaching Soviet

8 Ibid., 330.
10 Simon Philpott, “Is Anyone Watching? War, Cinema, and Bearing Witness,” 329. The film was so blatantly pro-United States policy that a critic from the New York Times described it as, “… so unspokenable, so stupid, so rotten and false in every detail that it passes through being fun, through being funny, through being camp, through everything and becomes an invitation to grieve, not for our soldiers or for Vietnam (the film could not be more false or do a greater disservice to either of them), but for what happened to the fantasy-making apparatus in this country. Simplicities of the right, simplicities of the left, but this one is beyond the possible. It is vile and insane.” See David Martin Jones and M. L. R. Smith, “The Rise of Dark Americana: Depicting the ‘War on Terror’ On Screen,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39, no. 1 (2016): 7.
Union. Iconic characters like James Bond and Rambo returned to the big screen to fight alongside the Afghani mujahideen against America’s greatest enemy. These films no doubt depicted the mujahideen as second rate to their Western counterparts, but nonetheless imagined the Afghan and Arab fighters as brave, unconquerable heroes defending freedom. These views were not limited to the big screen. Beyond Hollywood, the Reagan Administration championed the mujahideen as “the moral equivalents of America’s founding fathers.” These depictions soon proved problematic following the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of terror as the most pressing threat to democracy.

Following what was then becoming a cinematic tradition, producers were forced to deal with their positive depictions of America’s new enemy. The blockbuster hit Rambo III (1988) scrambled to reconcile the new face of terrorism in the 1990s with its depictions of the mujahideen as noble freedom fighters. Interestingly, the directors had already cut an alternate ending where Sylvester Stallone’s character opts not to return to the United States, but to remain with the Afghans to continue fighting against the Soviets. Despite the more politically agreeable ending, producers were nonetheless worried about how the film would be received after the fall of the Soviet Union. This concern became even more pronounced after 9/11 and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan when the mujahideen were linked to the formation of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Discussing this “cultural transition” in 2013, Stallone said of the now-troublesome depiction of the Afghan fighters: “I was not happy with Rambo III. Who knew that the guys I go in and save have become Al-Qaeda and the guy I’m supposed to be talking to was Bin Laden; that was a bad move.” Sharing a similar sentiment as Stallone, Rambo III’s producers edited the dedication at the end of the film following the September 11 attacks. Previously it stated, “This Film is Dedicated to the Brave Mujahideen Fighters of Afghanistan,” but was revised after 9/11 to say, “This film is Dedicated to the Gallant People of Afghanistan.” This move was suggestive of larger trends in the industry and resulted in numerous films casting Muslims and Arabs as terrorists bent on destroying the Western World.

Stallone’s quotation illustrates a popular theme in the pre-9/11 films

11 Mahmood Mamdani, Good Muslim, Bad Muslim (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 98.
13 Ibid., 449.
14 Ibid., 450.
about terrorism that is integral to understanding the cinematic shift after 2001; namely, the centrality of the Western hero. Stallone’s description of the mujahideen as “the guys I go in and save” illustrates a larger trope in American war films that is reminiscent of one of Edward Said’s points in Orientalism. Said writes, “Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world.”

Said’s general point, that Western representation of the other tells us more about the West than anyone else, is seen in Stallone’s conceptualization of the film as fundamentally about him, the Western savior, liberating the mujahideen from the Soviet aggressors. This theme is not limited to Rambo. Tom Secker notes that there was only one film on the entire Soviet-Afghan War that provided any description of Afghan culture. This theme pervades fiction about the Middle East and repeatedly enlists depthless characters that result in a gross misrepresentation of the causes, realities, and repercussions of conflict. Interestingly, a consciousness that addresses this issue of depth emerges in varying degrees in post-9/11 war films.

**Critical Spaces**

In January of 2007, the United States Government announced that it would increase the number of soldiers in Iraq by 20,000. This decision was later known as “the surge,” and resulted in the military’s deadliest year in the War on Terror. As Americans reeled from the increasing news of military deaths, Hollywood released *Charlie Wilson’s War*, which documented the CIA’s arming of the mujahideen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Breaking from the apologetic approach seen by Rambo III following 9/11, the directors of *Charlie Wilson’s War* directly addressed the historical origins of the Taliban and al-Qaeda by depicting the process that led to supplying the mujahideen with over half a billion dollars in weapons and training. The film dramatizes one man’s role, Texas Representative Charlie Wilson, in this covert operation. Played by Tom Hanks, the film shows how Wilson drew on his power as a member of the House Defense Committee to increase CIA

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funding for the mujahideen to five hundred million dollars.

Satire is central to the film. It begins with Wilson lounging in a hot tub full of strippers in Las Vegas while he watches a news report on the Soviet-Afghan War. Suddenly uninterested in the topless women sitting in front of him, Wilson asks why Dan Rather is wearing a “turban” on national television. One woman responds, “He’s doing a thing from India.” The woman’s confusion between India and Afghanistan is a classic trope in Orientalist film and literature, and appears throughout the movie. In several scenes, characters confuse Afghanistan with other nations in the region, or more broadly refer to the country as “over there.” The frequency of these references, and the settings in which they occur, suggest that the directors were satirizing American ignorance of the Middle East. Given the context of increasing U.S. involvement in Iraq when the film was released, these scenes can be understood as critically commenting on America’s historical precedent of intervening in a region that it knew little about.

This ignorance was not limited to the stripper in the hot tub; it permeated the government as well. CIA agents repeatedly showcase their cluelessness about the country into which they are vehemently trying to funnel weapons. When Wilson asks a top-ranking CIA officer what the official U.S. policy is in Afghanistan, the agent replies, “Well strictly speaking we don’t have one, but we’re working real hard on that.” Similarly, during a conversation on the logistical struggle of moving weapons through the country the same agent asks, “You think Afghanistan might one-day start thinking about building some fucking roads?” These comments highlight not only the CIA’s ignorance of Afghanistan, but also its insensitivity to the historical forces that shaped the country. These dialogues are not products of Orientalist thought, however; they are critical responses to it. Further support for this hypothesis appears in a scene where Wilson meets with the President of Pakistan to secure a deal for the mujahideen. As they sit down for the meeting, Wilson asks the President for a glass of whiskey. Aggravated, but unsurprised, the President explains that they do not have alcohol in the presidential residence. Embarrassed, Wilson responds, “I bet a lot of people make that mistake.” The President curtly replies, “No.”

This exchange between Wilson and the Pakistani President opens the door to one of the film’s larger criticisms of the United States’ policy in Afghanistan; namely, the lack of forethought in American intervention and its repercussions. In a rush to solidify his agenda of arming the mujahideen “to kill some Russians,” Wilson evidenced his ignorance of Pakistan’s cultural
and religious customs by asking for a glass of whiskey. This theme returns in a haunting way at the end of the film, but Wilson is a new man. During a meeting with the same Defense Committee who allocated half a billion dollars to arming the mujahideen, Wilson proposes giving one million dollars for school reconstruction in Afghanistan. His committee members roll their eyes, and address him as the “Congressman from Kabul.” Wilson reminds the committee that it has given “billions” to providing weapons, and remarks: “This is what we always do. We go in, with our ideals and we change the world. And then we leave. We always leave.” Wilson’s point can be understood not only as a comment on the Soviet-Afghan War, but also on the contemporary conflict in Iraq. He indirectly links the arming of the mujahideen with the war that America was fighting when the film was released. He says, “Half the population is under the age of fourteen. Now think how fucking dangerous that is. They’re going to go home to find their families are dead. Their villages have been napalmed. And they don’t know who did it. They don’t get home delivery of the New York Times, and even if they did, [our support] was covert, remember?” Wilson’s point receives a blunt response from the chair of the committee—“Charlie, no one gives a shit about a school in Pakistan.” The film ends with Wilson receiving an award for his involvement in the mission, though his pride is mitigated by skepticism that arming the mujahideen will backfire.

It is not hard to see the critical intervention that Charlie Wilson’s War made in American war cinema. Although the film dramatized a conflict fought over two decades prior, it connected the United States’ failure to adequately assist the Afghans beyond weapons with the wars raging in modern-day Iraq and Afghanistan. The directors also articulated one of the most charitable and nuanced depictions of Arabs and Muslims in war cinema to date. While much of the motivation driving Wilson’s efforts to obtain funding for the mujahideen was to defeat the Soviet Union, his experiences with Afghans were the ultimate motivator in his relentless efforts. One scene depicts him visiting a refugee camp in Pakistan that stretches well beyond the camera’s view. When Wilson returns to the American Embassy to demand funding, and a diplomat tells him that he does not have time to speak, Wilson replies, “Fuck your time. Have you been to the refugee camps? Have you heard these stories?” Similarly, when the chair of the Defense Committee downplays Wilson’s efforts, he responds, “The [Afghans] are not just ‘people.’ They are farmers and children fighting our enemies.” These dialogues speak to Wilson’s transformation from wanting to merely use the Afghans as a conduit for “killing some Russians” to viewing
them as full humans.

Despite these positive shifts, the film remains littered with Orientalist tropes. This point is seen most clearly in the title. As Tom Secker notes, the movie reduced “the mujahideen to a few guys firing stinger missiles [and focused] almost entirely on the rich white Americans who won the Soviet-Afghan War from the comfort of their mansions and limousines. The film is not called ‘The Mujahideen’s War,’ or even ‘The CIA’s War,’ but ‘Charlie Wilson’s War.’”\(^{18}\) Secker’s observation speaks to the larger tradition in American war cinema that valorizes the Western heroes who ‘won the war’ by mitigating the impact of their non-white allies. Moreover, the film corroborates popular notions of the Muslim world as an oppressor of women. This trope is voiced by the chair of the House Defense Committee who initially refuses to assist Wilson’s partnership with Pakistan, citing its laws that four witnesses have to be present for a woman’s claims of rape to be considered. Wilson only wins the chair’s support after he persuades the Pakistani President to free a blind girl from prison who was raped and charged with adultery. Finally, dialogues that describe Afghanistan as pre-modern and backward occur throughout the film. One CIA agent remarks, “Afghanistan is barely a country. There’s no phones or roads outside of the city. It’s likely that a villager will live his life without having contact with another village three miles down the road unless he was going to war against them.” Statements such as these lack the satirical ring that appeared in the repeated confusion between Afghanistan and India, and describe Afghan interaction as inherently violent.

While *Charlie Wilson’s War* falls short in its depictions of Arabs and Muslims, *The Hurt Locker* (2008) fails miserably. Released just one year later, *The Hurt Locker* tracks an Explosive Ordinance Disposal (EOD) team through their last three weeks of deployment in Iraq. Following the death of their team leader at the hands of an Iraqi insurgent, the team acquires a former Army Ranger who repeatedly endangers his soldiers in pursuit of his addiction for war. The film focuses almost entirely on the new team leader, Staff Sergeant William James, and rarely affords any of the Iraqi characters a voice. It is not until well over thirty minutes into the film that an Iraqi child who peddles bootlegged DVDs to the American soldiers approaches James and says, “Yo, my nigga. What’s up? You want the cool shit?” The boy represents one of the only instances in the entire film where an Iraqi speaks. The overwhelming majority of Arab and Muslim characters are depicted ominously watching from rooftops and minarets while the American soldiers defuse

bombs in the streets. Their passiveness is routinely translated into complicity and support for the insurgency, as almost always one of the loiters is guilty of planting the bomb. The only major outlier to this theme occurs towards the end of the film when al-Qaeda fighters strap a bomb to an innocent Iraqi man that detonates after the EODs are unable to defuse it. This scene provides an opportunity for the directors to address the liminal spaces in the occupation of Iraq, but they do not meaningfully explore it.

Shortcomings aside, The Hurt Locker creates a space for a highly critical account of U.S. policy in Iraq. The film begins with a quote from American journalist Chris Hedges: “The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug.” This theme appears repeatedly throughout the film. In one scene, James is smoking a cigarette in the Humvee after defusing a bomb that unnecessarily put his entire team at risk when a ranking officer approaches James to question him about his actions. Viewers are made to think that the officer will scold him for his carelessness, but the following dialogue ensues:

**Colonel Reed:** You the guy in the flaming car, Sergeant James?
**Staff Sergeant William James:** Afternoon, sir. Uh... uh, yes, sir.
**Reed:** Well, that’s just hot shit. You’re a wild man, you know that?
**James:** Uh, yes, sir.
**Reed:** [looking to the others] He’s a wild man. You know that? I want to shake your hand.
**James:** Thank you, sir.
**Reed:** Yeah. How many bombs have you disarmed?
**James:** Eight hundred seventy-three, sir.
**Reed:** Eight hundred... and seventy-three! Eight hundred... and seventy-three. That’s just hot shit. Eight hundred and seventy-three.
**James:** Counting today, sir, yes.
**Reed:** That’s gotta be a record. What’s the best way to go about disarming one of these things?
**James:** The way you don’t die, sir.
**Reed:** That’s a good one. That’s spoken like a wild man. That’s good.

Colonel Reed’s exuberance over James’ actions—which risked the lives of two of his team members—highlights his fetishization of violence and danger. Importantly, Colonel Reed enters the scene only after the threat has dissipated, demonstrating his distance from the danger that he romanticizes.
Reed’s demeanor is so over-exaggerated that the scene is supposed to be satirical. Both of these men’s failure to think of the mission as anything more than an astonishing statistic is juxtaposed with the other soldiers desperately trying to survive their last few weeks in Iraq.

In the following scene, one of these soldiers, Specialist Owen Eldridge, describes his doubts about James to his psychiatrist, Colonel Cambridge. The Colonel responds, “You know, this doesn’t have to be a bad time in your life. Going to war is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It could be fun!” Eldridge asks, “Do you know this from your extensive fieldwork? Where did you do it? Yale?” His response again draws attention to the distance between the soldiers fighting the war and the officers planning the war. It is no coincidence that the Colonel’s name is “Cambridge,” highlighting his positionality as completely out of touch with the experience of an enlisted soldier’s reality.

The final scene of the film revisits the addictive nature of war, this time in a monologue by James. By this point in the film, viewers are acutely aware of his addiction for violence and danger, but have yet to receive any explanation. In a previous scene where he begins to articulate his story, the scene cuts back to him riding in the Humvee, suggesting that a coherent explanation is out of reach. Now, sitting at home with his child, James says to his son:

“You love everything, don’t ya? Yeah. But you know what, buddy? As you get older... some of the things that you love might not seem so special anymore, you know? Like your Jack-in-a-Box. Maybe you’ll realize it’s just a piece of tin and a stuffed animal, but the older you get, the fewer things you really love, and by the time you get to my age, maybe it’s only one or two things. With me, I think it’s one.”

James’ monologue comes immediately after he goes to the grocery store with his wife and stands dumbfounded in the cereal aisle. Overwhelmed by the options in the store, and convinced that the army needs him back in Iraq, he grabs a random box of cereal and leaves. James’ inability to participate in daily activities illuminates just how out of touch he is from civilian life. The next scene shows him returning to Iraq to begin a year-long deployment.

*The Hurt Locker*’s discussion of war addiction is important because the film also raises the moral ambiguity of the conflict, thus questioning the value of soldiers’ fight and sacrifice. While James rarely stops to reflect on the
motivations or repercussions of his violence, most of the soldiers around him do. Sergeant Sanborn, James’ colleague who is anxious to return home and start a family, reflects, “Another two inches, shrapnel zings by, slices my throat, I bleed out like a pig in the sand. Nobody’ll give a shit.” Voicing a similar anxiety, Eldridge says to his psychiatrist, “I got a question about that song … ‘Be All You Can Be.’ What if all I can be is dead on the side of an Iraqi road? I mean, I think it’s logical. This is a war. People die all the time. Why not me?” These voices question the real value of their service, and the ever-present threat of dying. They are also sharply juxtaposed with the satirical depictions of the war-hungry soldiers like James, Cambridge, and Reed, suggesting that heroism might not be located in the actual fighting of the War on Terror. While other authors have contended that this film “focuses on the heroic commitment of U.S. servicemen to their mission,” they have failed to fully develop the argument. Heroism, as seen in The Hurt Locker, is not located in the individual’s part in ‘something bigger,’ but in the individual’s struggle to survive with his team members in a highly questionable war. This distinction roots heroism in survival, rather than U. S. victory. Sanborn’s and Eldridge’s characters, then, differ sharply from the long history of war cinema where sacrifice was one of highest ideals for American soldiers.

Created by the same directors and writers (Kathryn Bigelow and Mark Boal), Zero Dark Thirty (2012) depicts a competing picture of heroism and sacrifice. It dramatizes the intelligence community’s ceaseless efforts to hunt down Osama bin Laden, and follows one CIA agent, Maya, in her decade long search. The directors go to great lengths to represent her as a reclusive agent obsessed with tracking down the leader of al-Qaeda. In several different scenes, concerned colleagues approach her and encourage her to “find a friend” or “hook up” to momentarily get her mind off work. When asked by a younger agent who idealizes her to get dinner, Maya responds, “I don’t eat out. Too dangerous.” These traits culminate in her own articulation as, “A lot of my friends have died trying to do this. I believe I was spared to finish the job.” Maya’s character fits within the trope in war cinema of a strong Western hero whose dedication eventually saves the day, but also represents a development in post-9/11 cinema that is also seen in The Hurt Locker—the disconnect between working agents and the bureaucracy of hierarchy. Maya constantly fights her director’s demands for intelligence that will result in

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20 Ibid., 13.
“strikes” in her quest for the “bigger pieces of the puzzle” that lead to bin Laden. These efforts ultimately result in the raid that killed bin Laden, thus connecting her sacrifice with reward and the good of the nation.

Zero Dark Thirty’s major contribution to the genre was its depiction of “enhanced interrogation,” and its role in fighting the War on Terror. Critics blasted Bigelow’s “ambivalent attitude” toward the practice, citing that she presented it as effective in hunting down bin Laden. Close analysis suggests a more nuanced view. The opening scene shows a man hanging by his arms in a dark room. CIA agents in black masks walk in and begin interrogating him. One unmasked agent tells the detainee, “I own you, Amar. You belong to me.” When the man refuses to speak, the agent unstraps the man from the ceiling, tackles him to the ground, and begins water-boarding him. Again, unsuccessful at evoking a confession, the agent leaves and returns with a dog collar. He makes the man get on all fours, stating, “You’re my dog. I gotta walk you.” The agent then “walks” the man to a box smaller than the size of a coffin, and tells him that he will put him in it if he does not tell the agents when the next attack will occur. Again, unsuccessful, the man refuses to cooperate and is stuffed in the box. It is only after the agents outsmart Amar, without using torture, that he begins to cooperate. This scene complicates popular criticisms of Bigelow’s alleged support for enhanced interrogation by showing that it did not work, as the man never speaks, and the attack still occurs.

While the film later acknowledges that President Obama’s halt of enhanced interrogation disrupted the CIA’s search for bin Laden, the film invites the viewer to evaluate whether the morality of the practice outweighs the potential intelligence gathered. Images of detainees covered in their own feces, hanging from the ceiling, with their eyes swollen shut dominate the movie. Such heavy-handed depictions of torture compared to the relatively few mentions of the practice’s efficacy suggest that Bigelow and Boal were subtly critiquing enhanced interrogation without directly intervening. This subtly has been mistaken by critics for complicity or even support, but is evidenced in a scene where the CIA agent heading up the interrogation program interacts with a pair of pet monkeys on the military base. Standing outside the interrogation room, the agent feeds part of his ice cream cone to the


monkeys who are in a cage. As the monkeys eat the ice cream, thoughtful viewers recall an image of one detainee who was so starved that he clung to his food like a hungry animal when it was finally offered to him just minutes before. The movie then transitions from the monkeys to an interrogation scene where viewers are encouraged to make comparisons between the monkeys and the detainees who are both in a cage. While both are wholly dependent on the government officials, the monkeys enjoy fresh air and delicacies like ice cream, whereas the detainees are sleep deprived, starved, and beaten. These depictions show that the directors were far more critical of enhanced interrogation than many critics suggest.

*Zero Dark Thirty* also provides a subtle criticism of the United States’ drone policy at a time when it was under public scrutiny. In the film, high-ranking CIA agents relentlessly demand intelligence from Maya and her colleagues that will lead to “strikes.” One agent says, “I want targets. Do your fucking jobs. Bring me people to kill.” Maya, however, rejects this approach and tells her director, “You just want me to nail some low-level Mullah-crack-a-dulla so you can check the box on your resume that says while you were in Pakistan you got a real terrorist. But the truth is you don’t understand Pakistan and you don’t know al-Qaeda.” Maya’s refusal to support the agency’s demand for low-level strikes enables her to wholly pursue bin Laden, which culminates in his death and the theoretical demise of the organization.

The film also breaks from the long tradition in war cinema of depicting allies favorably. Notably, Pakistan was an American ally in the War on Terror, but the film questions the country’s relationship with bin Laden. During a briefing where CIA agents are looking at a map of the area surrounding the suspect compound, the director asks, “What’s this—this cluster of buildings down here?” Another agent explains that it is the Pakistani Military Academy, or “Pakistan’s West Point.” Maya then interjects that it is located less than a mile from the compound, suggesting that Pakistan may have been protecting America’s most wanted terrorist. This distrust materializes in the United States conducting a raid in the country without alerting Pakistani officials for fear that they would tip off bin Laden.

Despite these many interventions, *Zero Dark Thirty* perpetuates the popular binary of good and bad Muslims in Hollywood. Interestingly, the directors made a largely unprecedented move by depicting a white CIA director—only referred to as “the Wolf”—as a Muslim. In one scene, the agent who oversees the torture program interrupts the Wolf in his office one afternoon while he is praying. He continues praying while the agent waits at
the door. This scene complicates the long tradition of viewing Muslims as
the other by showing that they are important parts of the American govern-
ment, but also functions in the film to establish a sharp binary of good and
evil Muslims. The Wolf’s character is championed as the ideal for Muslims
through its juxtaposition with the many evil Muslims whom he and his
colleagues pursue. In addition to this scene, several others depict ‘good
Muslims’ as those that assist the intelligence community in their search for
bin Laden. Like The Hurt Locker, the majority of Muslim bodies represent an
ominous threat as they watch CIA agents from rooftops and loiter on the
streets. In other cases, masses of Muslims are depicted as complicit, as in the
case of the Pakistani Military.

A similar depiction of Arabs and Muslims appears in Clint
Eastwood’s film American Sniper (2012). The movie dramatizes the real
story of Navy SEAL Chris Kyle—nicknamed “the Legend” for recording
over 160 confirmed kills—and his mission to protect his family and country
from terrorism. While a bit more nuanced than Zero Dark Thirty in its depic-
tion of Muslims, the film relies heavily on a clash of civilizations narrative. In
a scene where one of his soldiers begins to question why they are in Iraq,
Kyle responds, “There’s evil here. We’ve seen it. You want these mother-
fuckers to come to San Diego or New York? We’re protecting more than just
this dirt.” Kyle’s response, coupled with his frequent references to Iraqis as
“savages,” and his unit’s policy that “any military age male who is still [in Fal-
lujah] is here to kill you,” makes all Muslim bodies suspect and therefore
dangerous to Western Civilization. Despite these common tropes, Eastwood
addresses some of the complexities of the Iraqi insurgency. During a raid,
for example, one Iraqi says, “If we talk to the U.S. Soldiers [al-Qaeda] will
come here to make examples of us.” This man’s fear of talking with Kyle and
his team highlights the liminal space that many Iraqis occupied during the
conflict. Like The Hurt Locker, however, these themes remain largely
unexplored.

Despite this shortcoming, the film brilliantly depicts the psychological
ramifications of war, albeit mostly on western bodies. The film documents
Kyle’s four tours in Iraq and tragic death in 2012 at the hands of a fellow
soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the film, Kyle’s
struggle with PTSD appears after he returns home from his first deployment.
When his wife, Deby, asks him to talk about his thoughts, Kyle can only say,
“There’s a war going on and people aren’t even talking about it. I’m not sup-
posed to be here. I should be over there.” This response leads him to embark
on three additional tours, each one compounding his inability to reacclima-
tize to regular life. By the end of the film, Kyle is effectively dead to the world and trapped in his head. Begging him to get help, his wife laments, “Even when you’re here, you’re not here. I see you. I feel you. But you’re not here.” Deby’s words draw attention to the pain shared by many families of veterans and illuminate the problems that arise when welcoming a soldier back into family life. Eastwood articulates this struggle especially well in a scene near the end of the movie. Kyle is sitting with his wife on their deck during a neighborhood barbeque when he notices that the children are playing tug of war with the dog. Convinced that the dog is becoming too aggressive, he lurches off the deck, removes his belt, and throws the dog to the ground. Kyle is stopped from hitting it only by his wife’s screams, at which point he becomes aware of what he is doing. Scenes such as these illuminate the repercussions of war and draw much-needed attention to the epidemic of PTSD among veterans.

While the film has little to say about the psychological trauma of non-western bodies, it does “bear witness” in some regard to the violence inflicted in Iraq. Contrary to a number of reviews that described the film as pro-violence or “an expression of nostalgia” for George Bush’s “Manichean approach to foreign policy,” *American Sniper* provides a relatively nuanced view of the occupation. In one of the first scenes of the movie, Kyle aims at a suspicious woman and child walking toward his team of soldiers. When the woman reveals a bomb, he is forced to shoot her before she can harm his unit. Kyle’s teammate then pats him on the shoulders and says, “Fuck that was gnarly man!” Disgusted, Kyle tells him to “get the fuck off” him, indicating that killing is not something to be celebrated. A similar point resurfaces at the end of the film as Kyle is target-shooting with a group of veterans. One of the men jokes that he should be called “the Legend” because of his pristine accuracy, to which Kyle responds, “Trust me, that’s not a nickname you want to have.” Kyle’s remarks differ greatly from Sergeant James and Colonel Reed’s lust for violence in *The Hurt Locker*, and allude to the negative implications of using force. To a lesser extent, Eastwood also shows how disruptive the United States’ policy of door-to-door raids was for Iraqis. During one raid, Kyle screams at an Iraqi man “you shouldn’t be here” because “this is a fucking war zone,” to which the Iraqi man replies, “This is my home. I stay.” These exchanges are no doubt overshadowed by the film’s larger goal of depicting Kyle’s story, but nonetheless attest to some of the ramifications of American violence in Iraq.

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Reel Effects

Together, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, *The Hurt Locker*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, and *American Sniper* begin to represent the major interventions that post-9/11 film made in American war cinema. Breaking from long traditions of censorship, silence, or outright support for state interests, these motion pictures interrogated the origins, methods, and repercussions of the War on Terror. Cumulatively they grossed over $850,000,000 and reached tens of millions of viewers. This wide viewership resulted in public discourse that addressed much-needed conversations about American foreign policy, the morality of issues like torture, and the effects of violence on American soldiers. Differing from pre-9/11 war films, these movies openly criticized and questioned a conflict that was still ongoing. It is difficult to gauge how these motion pictures influenced the average viewer. However, if the government’s long investment in funding Hollywood suggests anything about the power of the big screen, it is that these films must have had a profound effect not only on documenting the War on Terror, but on directing it.

Further research should explore how the masses responded to these films, and question the extent to which average viewers engaged with and responded to the ideas that a close observation yields. Researchers should question what viewers of *Charlie Wilson’s War* thought about the United States arming the mujahideen without providing education afterwards, or how viewers felt about the efficacy of enhanced interrogation after watching *Zero Dark Thirty*. This inquiry would be especially enlightening if film theorist Susan Hayward is right in suggesting, “The discourses surrounding films constitute one of the modes by which ‘the national’ is enunciated.” If films create a discursive place as she maintains, then how did the central questions raised in post-9/11 film shape viewers’ conceptualizations of U.S. policy, Muslims, and other topics? An inquiry as large as this one would have to move beyond major film critics and engage with different samples of viewers to understand the role that post-9/11 films play in knowledge production.

This paper provides a starting point for such an endeavor, and can reasonably hypothesize about the genre’s effect on Muslims and Arabs in the American imaginary. While post-9/11 film may create room for tension and

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criticism of the United States Government, it does not appear that the same would be true for more realistic depictions of Muslims and Arabs. For all that films like *Charlie Wilson’s War* do to subtly critique orientalist tropes, the overwhelming majority of post-9/11 films were consistent with the long cinematic history of demonizing Muslims. Films like *The Hurt Locker* and *American Sniper*, which rarely gave their Arab characters a voice, perpetuated the orientalist practice of speaking for the other, and thereby representing them as dangerous, pre-modern, and uncivilized. These depictions, unfortunately, overshadow some of the more nuanced, charitable scenes in the films.

Prolonging orientalist imagery is not without consequences. As Liz Jackson argues, children understand popular media as educational—whether it is the news or Aladdin—because they have not yet developed the ability to distinguish between reality and fiction. A stronger version of Jackson’s thesis applies to adults as well, as other media outlets that associate Islam and terror “play an important role in the creation and distribution of ideologies, and thereby contribute to the overall production of knowledge.” Thus, when children and adults routinely hear and see Muslims as complicit or direct actors in terrorism without intervening information, it is no surprise when people associate the two together. These associations result in confirmation biases, which suggests that many viewers would not change their views of Arabs and Muslims by watching post-9/11 cinema, as they would likely identify with the stereotypical depictions while missing the more subtle interventions. This failure is concerning because of the impact that connections between Islam and terrorism have on Arabs and Muslims in the United States. Following the Oklahoma City Bombing, for example, more than 300 hate crimes occurred against Arab Americans despite not a single Arab being involved in the attack. These crimes were no doubt related to the prevalent association between Arabs and terror in the American imaginary. If post-9/11 film is going to build on its interventions in American war cinema, then it must address its maintenance of orientalist tropes. Dealing with these themes is a necessary step to creating spaces that meaningfully critique the

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government. As of now, criticisms stop short of completion by highlighting the horrors and repercussions of war without addressing the prejudices and practices that lead to war in the first place. This means that while post-9/11 cinema has critically responded to the War on Terror, it has only served as a reactionary force to the conflict. In order for the genre to move beyond reactionary critiques, it will have to acknowledge the mutually constitutive relationship between war and Orientalism.
The Terror and the Glory: The Two Witnesses and God’s Self-Vindication in Revelation 11

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Like tying a stone in a sling
is the giving of honor to a fool. —Proverbs 26:8

I may not live to see our glory,
But I’ve seen wonders great and small.
—“The Story of Tonight,” Hamilton

Introduction

On July 8, 1741, Jonathan Edwards stood at the pulpit in Enfield, Connecticut, and preached one of the most influential sermons to come out of the pre-revolutionary American colonies—“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Speaking on Revelation 19, Edwards warned those gathered at the parish that God would be manifest with terror and glory against the unconverted in the final chapters of human history:

There we read of the Winepress of the Fierceness and Wrath of

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1 I would like to thank Dr. Susan Hylen for both making the Book of Revelation engaging to aspiring ministers and scholars and for aiding in the revision of this project.

2 With the exception of this usage from the NIV, all other Scripture references are taken from the NRSV.
Almighty God. The Words are exceeding terrible [...] As tho’ there would be a very great Manifestation of his almighty Power, in what the fierceness of his Wrath should inflict, as tho’ Omnipotence should be as it were enraged [...] Consider this, you that are here present, that yet remain in an unregenerate State. That God will execute the fierceness of his Anger, implies that he will inflict Wrath without any Pity.3

Edwards’ interpretation of the Book of Revelation mirrors many popular interpretations in the present day: Revelation is a book that details future events spelling out doom and destruction for those who have not come to believe in Jesus. It is not the aim of this paper to convince the reader that this interpretive lens for Revelation has wide influence, especially in America. The enormous success of the Left Behind series, which has sold over sixty-five million copies, as well as the fact that a 2010 Pew Research survey found that forty-one percent of the American public believe that Jesus will come again in terrifying fashion by 2050, is enough to suggest that many American Christians read Revelation with fear, trembling, and violent apocalyptic expectations.4

There is a common theme in these interpretations of Revelation. They imply that God’s awe-inspiring, often violent manifestations in the last days, are intended to terrify the nations into a state of repentance.5 “Repentance,” in this line of interpretation, tends to mean a change from nonbelief in Jesus


5 Take, for example, these excerpts from a classic passage of Left Behind, 394-397: “The Holy Land attack had been a watershed event in his life [...] something otherworldly—yes, supernatural, something directly from God almighty—had been thrust upon those dusty hills in the form of a fire in the sky [...] Not that many months later came the great disappearance of millions around the world [...] What more did he need? It already seemed as if he were living in a science fiction thriller [...] Was it possible? Could he be on the cusp of becoming a born-again Christian? [...] If this signaled the soon beginning of the tribulation period predicted in the Bible, and Rayford had no doubt that it did, he wondered if there would be any joy in it. Bruce didn’t seem to think there would be, aside from the few converts they might be privileged to win.” Tim F. LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1995).
Christ to belief in Jesus Christ—hence Edward’s use of the term “unconverted” in his sermon as he spells out eternal damnation for people who do not acknowledge Jesus. In this manner, the glorious manifestations of God “predicted” in Revelation are intended to be part of a divine scare tactic to coerce the nations into belief.

This paper proves that this manner of interpreting Revelation is ultimately unfounded. My two primary contexts are the cultures of honor and shame that produced the biblical writings and the pericope of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. I argue that the glorious manifestations of God have a much more nuanced and cosmic purpose than terrifying the unrepentant into cognitive salvation. I will discuss honor and shame cultures, “fear words” and “glory words” in the Bible, the theme of vindication in the Old Testament, and end with an analysis of Revelation 11 and the two witnesses to show a more profound form of repentance. The people in Revelation 11 experience repentance as glorification of God and do so not because of divine scare tactics, but because of God’s magnificent vindication of His own name through the resurrection of the two witnesses.

The reader should know the limits of my approach at the outset. My approach is a theological reading of Revelation that assumes the coherence of the biblical canon. This approach finds the biblical canon to be a sufficient framework for interpreting terminology and tracing semantic development. Of course, one can argue the sufficiency of reading within these limits; however, my personal conviction is that such a canonical read is theologically fruitful for the work of the Church.

I. Honor and Shame

It is self-evident that the biblical writings emerging from the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean Basin are products of those cultures’ core values of honor and shame. Both Old Testament and New Testament scholars have extensively written about the values of honor and shame in their relation to the biblical texts. Honor and shame, with all their implications and connotations, were intractable features of the cultures that produced the Bible. However, we will only focus on these features of the honor-shame culture as they are relevant to the discussion of fear and glorification in Revelation 11.

1. Honor was the single most important cultural commodity—far
more important even than wealth, which was itself a means of gaining honor.\(^7\)

2. Honor was owed to a *superior* (a deity, elder, parent, successful warrior) by an *inferior* (a child, worshiper of a deity, lesser deity, or one defeated in battle).\(^8\)

3. Honor was primarily understood as the commodity of high social standing, and belonged to an individual or family within a society or tribe. Consequently, honor was attained or lost in the public sphere. Honor was entirely dependent on the community’s *affirmation* of an individual or family’s claim to honor.\(^9\)

4. Shame was understood as the public loss of honor.\(^10\)

5. Honor and shame cultures produced complex social codes—written and unwritten. If followed, the codes resulted in honor. If disobeyed, they brought shame.\(^11\)

These features are important to this discussion because a) there is scholarly consensus on their validity and b) they have pertinence for both the Ancient Near Eastern context of the Old Testament and the Mediterranean context of the New Testament.

These features also lay a backdrop for both the Old and New Testaments. These values permeated both the Hellenistic culture of the author of Revelation (whom I will henceforth refer to as John) and the Hebrew tradition of the Old Testament, which John claims and utilizes for himself One way he does this is through words of fear and glory.

### II. Terror

All cultures throughout history have understood and named the experi-


\(^10\) Ibid., 218–219.

\(^11\) For example, when a dignitary sent messengers to another dignitary, the reception of the messengers was an act of honoring their sender, while refusing them shamed the sender.
ence of fear. However, it is difficult to sum up the experience of fear in one word. There is no single word in either the Old Testament (OT) or the New Testament (NT) that conveys what we describe in English as fear, terror, or dread. In fact, approximately fifteen different Hebrew words are employed in the OT to convey the broad meanings associated with the idea of fear, and approximately six Greek words in the NT.

In the OT, there are many synonyms for fear and its related concepts. The word most employed for the broad concept of fear or terror is *yara,* “to fear” (331 uses). This word is supplemented with other forms such as the participial *yareh,* “one who fears” (fifty-five uses) and the nominal *pachad,* “dread” (forty-nine uses). Remarkably, though there are many words employed, the Hebrew Bible demonstrates a somewhat narrow semantic range of meaning. For example, the less-commonly used words, such as *deagah,* “anxiety,” (only six uses) do not seem to denote significantly different meanings within their contexts than words like *yara* and *pachad* mentioned above. This plethora of synonyms evidences the centrality of fear and its related concepts to the societal worldview of the Ancient Near East: cultures used many words to get at the same ubiquitous reality.

There is a marked development of how these “fear words” are used throughout the Hebrew Bible. In my reading, fear words are most often used in the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History to describe the Israelites’ terrified reaction to the glory of God. Here, fear is an intense experience of God’s presence that leads to reverence or honor. This Pentateuchal usage is arguably the most important use of fear words in the OT because of its frequency and impact on the NT. In the Prophetic writings, fear words are commonly used to describe the Israelites’ honor-shame relationship to God: Yahweh is not to be shamed, but is to be greatly honored through the Israelites’ fear of Him. The prophets describe the sinful practices of the Israelite people (especially their turn to foreign gods) to be a consequence

13 Ibid.
15 Examples include Ex 2:14; 3:6; 14:31; Lev. 19:14; Num. 20:6; Deut. 13:11; Josh. 4:24.
16 Examples include Is. 57:11; Jer. 5:22, 44:10; Mal. 4:10; Ezek. 30:13.
of their lack of fear; the people do not fear God, and therefore do not obey God out of reverence. Finally, in literature occurring just before exile, most notably Ezekiel, Isaiah, and parts of the Psalms, fear words are used alongside God’s wonderful manifestations both to the Israelites and to “all the nations.” Some of these manifestations are salvific acts on behalf of the Israelites; others, as we shall see, are God’s acts of self-vindication when the Israelite people fail to fear God.

All of these OT instances of fear words are used within the context of human relationships to the divine. While there are a few exceptions, this divine human relationship is the context for the vast majority of fear words in the OT.

The NT use of fear words is both unique in some ways and similar to the OT in other ways. The word employed most in the NT for fear and similar concepts is the verb *phobeo*, “to terrify” or “to frighten” (ninety-five uses). There are not as many synonyms in the NT as in the OT, though words like the nominal *phobos*, “terror/fear” (forty-seven uses) and the adjective *deilos*, “cowardly/fearful” (four uses) accompany *phobeo*. Like the OT, these words do not have remarkably different meanings. However, from my reading, the NT is different from the OT in that it employs these fear words in two different ways. In some cases, it adopts the OT use of fear as it relates to the presence of God. But in most cases the use of fear words is broadened to many occasions other than divine presence alone, referring to a more general experience of fear (such as fear of objects, natural disasters, dangerous people, etc.).

Nevertheless, when fear *does* relate to divine presence, it bears a strong resemblance to the OT. The Pentateuchal use of fear is especially prominent in these cases: fear as a reaction leading to reverence when a human encounters the divine presence of God. In the NT, this usage is evident in human reaction to Jesus as it was to the Israelites’ reaction to Yahweh in the OT: the people have reverence when they encounter Jesus. It is especially easy to see this influence in the Gospel narratives when angels or other messengers present themselves to humans. However, in my reading, there is no marked development of fear words in the NT as there is in the OT. The NT does not present a cohesive, chronological narrative development from Matthew to Revelation in which fear words take different nuances as it progresses, nor does the NT employ fear words differently across genre. Instead, they tend to

18 Examples include Mt. 2:22, 10:26; Mk. 11:32; Jn. 9:22; 2 Cor. 11:3; Gal. 4:11.
19 Examples include Mt. 9:8, 14:27, 17:6; Mk 4:41, 5:15, 10:32, 16:8; Rev. 1:17.
carry the same general meaning.

A central theme of both the OT and NT is that fear is only effective when it is an agent that leads to glorification. Though unmistakably present in the OT, this dynamic is more clearly articulated in the NT, especially in the Gospel according to Luke. Looking first at the miracles of Jesus in Luke, we see that everyone who sees miracles experiences a state of fear.\(^{20}\) However, in Luke, only the Jews end up glorifying God, not the Gentiles. Turning to the Book of Acts, however, the salvific plans of God come into fuller clarity, and the disciples understand that God means for even the Gentiles to be saved. Consequently, the Gentiles who observe the miracles of the apostles are also caught up in the history of God’s salvation by falling into a state of fear and then glorifying God.\(^ {21}\) Thus, in both the OT and NT, fear is intended to be an agent that leads to reverence, or, most notably, the glorification and honor of God.

### III. Glory

Unlike fear words in the Bible, which carry a narrow range of meaning with multiple synonyms, the different words used in the OT and NT for glory carry a broad range of meanings with few synonyms. Translations of these few words are inordinately subject to interpretive decision and depend heavily on context.

The root word behind most glory words in the OT is the Hebrew kayod. Kayod and its various forms carry multiple meanings: weight, light, glory, and honor. The nominal Kayod (approx. 200 uses) most often carries denotations of honor or social standing. The variant adjective kayed (approx. 115 uses) is extremely similar in meaning, but is most often used to describe something that is “weighty.” Another notable word is pa’ar (approx. fifteen uses), which carries similar meanings to kayod but is a verbal form meaning to “give glory” to someone or something.

Despite appearing unrelated, these different meanings are closely connected. In the Ancient Near East, to give “weight” to someone’s name or reputation was to give it honor.\(^ {22}\) Furthermore, many OT scholars think that what the Hebrew people called the “glory/weight” of God when narrating the Tabernacle stories of the wilderness wanderings was the brilliant light

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20 Examples include Lk. 8:25, 35, 37, 9:34, 2:19; Acts 2:43, 5:5, 19:17.
that shone through the tent. So, when someone’s name was so honored or weighty that it was “brilliant” or “shiny” like gold, that person was said to have glory. However, over half of the instances of these kayod words were used to describe Yahweh. Yahweh was the one to be most honored, making his name weighty and glorious.

The New Testament uses two primary words to describe glory: the nominal root word doxa and its verbal form, doxazo. Doxa (approx. 167 uses) is similar to OT meanings of glory, honor, or even praise. Doxazo (approx. sixty-two uses) is the action of “rendering glory or honor” to someone or something. While there are not quite as many words used to describe glory as are used in the OT, the central relationship between glory and honor in both testaments remains. To give someone glory is to give the highest honor to that person. Interestingly, in the NT, the possible rendering of doxa as “praise” or “of good social standing” emphasizes the social nature of honor more explicitly than in the OT. As described above, honor was a public affair in the Mediterranean culture. Hellerman, for example, contends that the explicit denotation of doxa as good public opinion makes clear the manner in which Jesus challenged the honor-shame customs of Roman-occupied Israel.23

Most importantly, glory words are often used in connection with fear words. As I mentioned before, glory and honor come from fear only when fear is an effective agent. This connection is supported by the often-used formula, both in the OT and NT: “[person or group] became afraid, and then glorified God.”24 The formula takes many forms, but almost always includes an element of fear, and then an element of glorification. The relationship is not merely sequential, it is causal—fear, when effective, results in glory.

Despite its prevalence, this formula is almost nonsensical apart from the cultural values of honor and shame. Again, glory and honor—in both biblical languages—are the same root word, kayod in the OT and doxa in the NT. So, then, the glorification of God primarily has to do with the honoring of God’s name in a culture that places honor as its highest cultural commodity. The self-understanding of the people of God in both testaments was that the highest honor belonged to God. Therefore, this formula supports the preexistent values of honor and shame, but makes a religious claim using these same values.

24 Examples include Exodus 14:21; 2 Chron. 7:3; Ps 102:15; Mk 2:12; Lk 5:26, 7:16; Acts 2:41, 13:48.
Critical readers of Scripture must understand honor and shame in the biblical context in order to talk meaningfully about the eschatological judgments of God in Revelation. As we have seen, the glorious manifestations of God lead to fear and terror, but this terror is meant to lead to the glorification and honoring of God’s name. Giving God the honor God deserves is a much different kind of repentance than either a cognitive recognition of Jesus as Savior or a turning away from sin. In fact, when the Greek *metanoeó* (“to repent”) is used, it is almost exclusively within the context of sinful transgressions.25 *Doxa*, however, is used five times as much as *metanoeó* and seems to be about something much deeper: giving honor to whom honor is due, encapsulating all other discussions of loyalty, obedience, and sin. Revelation emphasizes fear, and then more importantly, glory when speaking of repentance. This allows us to see that the central point of turning away from sin, through fear of God, is the glorification and recognition of the Creator by the world.

IV. A Failure of Fear: God’s Self-Vindication in the Old Testament

To understand the eschatological judgments of God in Revelation 11, we must also discuss God’s active role in glorifying His name in the Hebrew Bible. Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God continually refuse to honor God’s name. The prophetic writings are a testament to what seems like an endless cycle of disobedience on the part of the Israelites. Most often, the people glorify other gods, they fail to fear the name of Yahweh, and they bring public shame.26 Interestingly though, God takes an active role when the people refuse to fear and then glorify God. In some instances, when God is shamed, God disciplines the people.27 Other times—and it is these occasions that we are most concerned with—God chooses to vindicate His name rather than be shamed by the disobedience of the people. This divine self-vindication happens in several places, the most famous of which is Yahweh’s climactic pronouncement in Ezekiel 36:19-24 after the people of Israel had turned to other gods:

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25 Examples include Mt. 3:2, 4:17; Mk. 1:15, 6:12; Lk. 10:13, 13:3; Acts 2:38, 17:30; Rev. 2:5, 16, 3:3, 3:19.
26 Examples include Job 8:22; Is. 3:24, 23:9, 42:17; Jer. 2:26, 6:15, Jer. 9:19, 51:17.
27 This theme is especially prevalent through the period of exile, which Israel came to understand as God’s discipline after first understanding it as God’s punishment (Isaiah 27:8-9; Jer. 24:4-7; Ezek.11:14-21, 12:3, 39:28).
I scattered [Israel] among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries […] But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name […] But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. Therefore, say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes.”

In this instance, God decides to bring honor and glory to His name when Israel shames the name of God among the nations of the earth.

God’s self-vindication is hinted at in other places. The Psalms have multiple instances, such as Psalm 50:15, which shows God acting in order that the people might give God glory: “Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” Psalm 115:1 continues this theme, but here the plea is on the part of the writer who asks God to glorify His own name: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.” Isaiah is another rich source for God’s self-vindication, especially 29:13-14, where The Lord says: “Because these people draw near with their mouths and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote; so, I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing.”

In these examples, Israel’s failures to fear and revere God bring shame to God’s name through the lack of subsequent glorification. However, it seems that the people of God throughout the Old Testament understood at a basic level that God’s name would not suffer shame, even if they—God’s people—were the unrepentant. Because Yahweh was the highest, most honored deity, Yahweh would act on His own behalf to bring honor to His name. And the Israelites knew this self-vindication would come through “wondrous things” (Psalm 86:10) that bring fear, and then, hopefully, glorification.

28 Also see Ps. 29:9, 102:15, 45:1, 79:9, 86: 8-10.
29 Also see Is. 4:2, 24:23, 25:1, 66:14-16.
V. The Vindication of the Witnesses and of God

If someone repents because they are terrified of a judgment they rightfully deserve, is it true repentance? This question, which we must ask in relation to our fear-glory formula, emerges throughout the Book of Revelation, but perhaps nowhere more so than Chapter 11. In the account of the two witnesses in verses three to thirteen, the glory of God is manifested in mighty ways, packed into one short pericope. Two prophets are given authority to perform wonders, an earthquake strikes the city, and the breath of God results in a pair of resurrections. At the end of the story, it is said that the onlookers of Jerusalem “were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Verse 13). But we must wonder whether glory resulting from terror is true glory.

There are two central questions to be wrestled with in this section: 1) Is the “repentance” and glorification of the onlookers in Revelation 11 authentic? And most importantly, 2) Does the author, John, even intend for readers to ask this question, and if not, does he intend for us to ask another—namely, when the world doesn’t honor its own creator, who gets the last word?

To answer these questions, it will be helpful to first put Revelation 11 in context and then summarize the story of the two witnesses. Many scholars say that, from a structural standpoint, Revelation 11 is important because of its mediating location between two major sections of the book.\(^30\) In the events prior to Chapter 11, John has gone to great lengths to depict the faithlessness of the churches (Chs. 2-3), God’s place of honor on the throne (Chs. 4-5), and God’s judgments upon the earth (Chs. 6-9). Chapter 10, an apparent interlude, narrates the strange account of the angel’s mandate to John that he should “prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (10:11). Chapter 12, on the other side of the account of the two witnesses, begins the extended narrative that occupies most of the remainder of the book, a narrative that will ultimately end with the undoing of the beast. Though it is an oversimplification, the point remains that Chap-

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Chapter 11 is the middle point between the exhortations to the churches and visions of worship and judgment (Chs. 2-9), and the story of the undoing of the beast (Chs. 12-22).

Biblical writings are often written in chiastic “sandwiches,” and the middle phrase (the C in A-B-C-B-A format) contains the nugget of truth the author intends to convey. By applying chiasm to the structure of Revelation, we can see that Chapter 11, as the middle chapter, carries a degree of interpretive weight. Because of its structural significance, some argue that chapter 11 is a literary device used by John. For example, Bauckham, among others, suggests that chapter 11 is the textual content of the “little scroll” mentioned in chapter 10, though some are not as convinced by this reading. What many scholars do agree on is that Chapter 11 is a crucial interpretive hinge point of the book.

In Chapter 11, after the angel commands John to measure the temple, John is told that the two witnesses are granted authority to prophesy for 1,260 days, a number that appears elsewhere throughout the book in varying forms (Rev. 12:6, 14; 13:5). The witnesses are given a description that clearly evokes images of Old Testament prophets, though it is unclear whether or not John means for his readers to envision two specific figures. After their period of testimony, the beast kills the two witnesses, and the nations gloat over their dead bodies for three and a half days without burial—the ultimate form of dishonor. After three and a half days, though, the breath of God enters the bodies, and the witnesses stand on their feet once more before ascending to heaven. Not surprisingly, the onlookers are terrified, only to be frightened even more when a great earthquake strikes the city and kills 7,000 people. It is then that we get the troubling formula we have discussed: “the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.” But we must question whether this change of heart is authentic. This story is a perfect example

31 Ronald E. Man does a good job summarizing the pervasive use of chiasm both in the Semitic worldview and in Greek cultures in “The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation,” Bibliotheca Sacra, 141 (1984): 562. On 148, Man shows that the center of a passage is the emphasis the whole pericope.

32 David Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 85. Additionally, Mounce sees Chapter 11 as a literary device that “instructs the church” as to how they are to participate in the final judgment. (Mounce, “Revelation,” 99).


34 Blount, “Revelation,” 208. Blount argues that the plagues associated with the witnesses in verse six closely parallel Moses and Elijah. Furthermore, he sees the sackcloth mentioned in verse five as a clear reference to Old Testament imagery.
of what seems to be nothing but divine scare tactics that succeeded in terrifying people into belief.

After exploring how fear words and glory words are used throughout the Bible in the previous sections, it is important to evaluate whether John’s account fits the categories identified in the OT and NT. In verse two, John sees a vision of God giving the temple over to the Gentiles to be trampled. When understood within the Old and New Testament frameworks of honor and shame, the trampling of the temple is a profane act that results in shame in two ways.\(^{35}\) First, because honor and shame were won or lost in public, the trampling of the temple on the Israelite’s holy ground is a profane act made worse by its public nature, a public loss of honor in the eyes of the Gentiles. Secondly, the Gentiles’ profane act would be understood as shameful in the eyes of God as well, because the biblical worldview claims that the whole world owes honor to God. For the Gentiles to trample the temple is to shame God.

In verses four through six, John alludes to several OT miracles that were understood in their original context to be manifestations of God’s glory.\(^{36}\) These miracles closely mirror the figures of the OT and Elijah, so much so that some interpreters choose to explicitly identify the two witnesses with the prophets Moses and Elijah.\(^{37}\) But the specific identities of the witnesses are of less importance than the function of the OT miracles John refers to in Revelation 11. First, fire comes from the mouth of the witnesses should anyone try to harm them. This reference likely alludes to either 2 Kings, Chapter One, in which Elijah calls down fire upon the messengers of Ahaziah three times, or to 1 Kings, Chapter Eighteen, in which Elijah calls down fire upon the prophets of Baal. Second, the prophets have power to turn water into blood and to strike the earth with any plague of their choosing. These references undoubtedly refer to the ten plagues of Exodus chapters seven through eleven. All these references have two things in common. First, they refer to God’s liberation of oppressed people from bondage,\(^{38}\) and second, they are intended to lead those who witness them into an understanding of God’s supremacy over the gods of other nations. In the case of 1 Kings

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35 See Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations,” pp. 204-209, on the significance of cultic locations for ascribing honor or shame.
36 Exodus 7:3-7, 14:14, 17-18; 1 Kings 18:36-39.
37 Boring, “Revelation,” 146; Blount, “Revelation,” 208; Mounce “Revelation,” 216. All these sources explicitly identify the witnesses as Moses and Elijah.
38 Walter Brueggemann’s book, Testimony to Otherwise: The Witness of Elijah and Elisha (Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2001), deals with Elijah and Elisha’s confrontation with the oppressive Omri dynasty as its central theme.
18:39 and 2 Kings 1:13-15, the miracles lead to a reaction of fear and then glorification of God. In Exodus, though the intent of the miraculous plagues is for the Egyptians to glorify God so that they may “know that [God] is Yahweh” (7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 18), the above-mentioned formula “was terrified and then glorified God” is not effective because the plagues lead to the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Nevertheless, it is clear that the purpose of the plagues was to inspire the Egyptians to glorify God.

Verse eight contains two mentions of nations that the Hebrews understood to be “God-shamers.” The Israelites considered Sodom to be profane because of its sexual disobedience (Genesis 13:13), and Egypt did not honor Yahweh because of its veneration of other gods even when Yahweh manifested Himself as the true God (Exodus 7-11). Both the overt disobedience of Sodom and the failure of Egypt to recognize Yahweh as the highest God, the Israelites believed, were shameful in that they publicly ascribed dishonor to whom honor was due. These two nations are here surprisingly used to describe Jerusalem. Apparently, from John’s point of view, not even the holy city contained many God-fearing saints.

In verses nine and ten, John takes special care to mention that the two witnesses were left in the street without burial. Within the Jewish tradition especially, to refuse burial was considered an insulting act of dishonor. Again, the Israelites are shamed in the eyes of the Gentiles, and the Gentiles are shamed in the eyes of God for their profanity and failure to honor God.

Finally, Verse 13 contains the climactic moment in which the onlookers glorify God after a terrifying earthquake that killed seven thousand people. Once again, the familiar formula is used—a group of people becomes terrified, and that terror leads to glorification of God.

Looking at these occasions of fear and glory in Revelation 11:1-13, we can decide whether they match the function of the words in the OT and NT. I would argue that John’s use of fear words is informed by OT understandings that are also employed elsewhere in the NT. First, the fear words in Revelation are related to divine presence and not fear in general, just like in the OT. This is specifically a fear of God’s presence as seen in the Pentateuch, and a fear of God’s wonderful manifestation to all the nations as seen in parts of the Psalms and Isaiah. I would also argue that John’s use of glory words is also informed by the Old Testament and its subsequent use in the New Testament. As seen in Revelation 11, the glorification of God is a direct result of fear, and God’s self-vindication. God is powerfully manifested because the overt disobedience of the people and the shame this gives to God. Thus, one could argue that the Prophetic use of fear is present because
of the honor-shame values present in the story.

However, the formula breaks down because the miracles of the prophets do not lead to fear, honor, and glory, but to profanity directed against the prophets and God. Nevertheless, when the onlookers do not fear and honor God at the sight of the miracles, God resurrects the witnesses and vindicates Himself. Thus, the glorification of God in Revelation 11 is not a divine scare tactic to terrify the onlookers into cognitive repentance. On the contrary, when we read Revelation 11 through the lens of an honor-shame culture and with a deep engagement with how fear and glory words fit into such a culture, we see that the glorification of God is a result of God’s self-manifestation when the world does not honor Him who deserves it most.

Popular interpretations of Revelation that see the purpose of God’s mighty acts as an attempt to win converts through fear incorrectly place emphasis on human beings. Revelation 11 is a means to inspire God’s glorification. It is not about horror or inciting belief from sinners, and it is not a conversion tool for authors and preachers.

However, it can still be argued that fear, whether meant to result in repentance from the sinner or glorification of God, is still used as a scare tactic. One could see God’s methods of acquiring honor through fearful miracles as violent and coercive. Even so, the miracles of the Hebrew tradition are specific and need to be understood as such so that we can see that fear is not a tactic but a sense of being awestruck and a reason to glorify God. For example, Elijah “shut the sky” to cause a drought in 1 Kings 17 and called down fire from heaven against the prophets of Baal in the next chapter. Moses was given authority over the waters in Exodus 17 and was an agent of great plagues in Exodus 7-10. In Exodus, the glorious and terrifying works of God liberate the oppressed Israelites. They were not performed merely for the sake of terrifying Egypt into repentance. In 1 Kings, the miraculous deeds of Elijah, and later Elisha, were not for the sake of terrifying the leaders of the Omri dynasty into repentance, but to defend marginalized people that the empire oppressed.\(^{39}\) In their OT contexts, God’s works, while

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\(^{39}\) Brueggemann, “Testimony to Otherwise,” 46 argues that the miracles performed by Elisha, and previously Elijah, were to counter the givenness of the conventional empire that kept the most vulnerable in the margins. Speaking of Elisha’s career leading up to 2 Kings 8, he says, “In all of these acts, he is a wonder worker who has refused the given world that has left his people needful, in jeopardy, and under threat. In all five acts of rescue already committed by the prophet, Elisha has summoned inexplicable powers to enact transformative turns toward life that conventional givenness had excluded in principle.” The miracles had a specific function: liberation.
frightening, were a show of mercy and care for the oppressed—action worth glorifying—not the fear tactics of a power-hungry god. Thus, the two witnesses are brought to life again by the terrifying breath of God as an act of mercy. The vindication of the witnesses is the vindication of the merciful God, and it leads the nations to glorify Him.

John indicates that the two witnesses are examples for the Church to follow. John hopes that the Church will become a people shaped by the Lamb of God—a people who would rather be killed, faithful to their testimonies, than turn away from their call to witness, and glorify, the frightening but merciful God of the oppressed.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the story of the two witnesses in Revelation is not a story of divine scare-tactics, but rather a story of a merciful God whose work upon the earth, while often frightening, gives great cause for glory. This story becomes clear when it is understood as the product of an honor-shame culture, and that, because of this, John’s use of glory words and fear words must be compared to the use of such words in the OT and the NT to be truly meaningful. Finally, God’s manifestations of power in the context of Old and New Testament miracles show a fear that leads to true glorification of his mercy as he cares for the oppressed, not a fear derived from God’s dreadful power.

Saul Olyan has said that honor was most effectively conveyed in the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean through worship. Thus, when Israelites publicly and formally worshipped, they were participating in the loftiest means of honoring God. It is fitting, then, that Revelation 11 does not end with the story of the two witnesses, but rather concludes with a song of praise shouted to the God of glory and honor in the throne room:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.

40 Olyan, “Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations,” 204.
BOOK REVIEW

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In *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, Victoria Smolkin undertakes an unprecedented task by presenting a detailed historical account of Soviet atheism from the 1917 Revolution to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Smolkin is an Associate Professor of History at Wesleyan University, where she specializes in studies of communism, the Cold War, and religion and atheism in Russia and the USSR. Her first book, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, establishes her as a formidable scholar and contributor to the field of historical religion. This book traces the Communist Party’s efforts to rid the Soviet masses of their religious sentiment, to free them from the shackles of superstition and backwardness, and to impress atheism on their hearts instead. However, as Soviet leaders attempted to enforce what was effectively a religion of negation onto a religiously diverse society, they repeatedly met failure. Eventually, it became clear that religion was not going to disappear, and that even if it did, atheism would not be able to truly replace religious life.

The ideological forebears of Soviet communism, Marx and Lenin, saw religion as the product of an inherently flawed political and economic system: simultaneously a palliative for the suffering masses and a tool for their oppression by the wealthy. These thinkers predicted that religion would vanish when communism established a new system in which the worker would no longer be oppressed or need a sedative to survive. Not only was atheism thought to be the rational outcome of communism, but in fact, “the revolution could not be considered complete until religion was exorcized

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1 “Victoria Smolkin,” Wesleyan University, accessed March 16, 2019
https://www.wesleyan.edu/academics/faculty/vsmolkin/profile.html.
from the body politic.”

Through close attention to historical records, Smolkin recounts the cycle of committee meetings throughout the twentieth century wherein Communist Party officials tried to “make sense” of religion’s endurance and atheism’s failure to “reach the Soviet soul.” Smolkin’s research charts the state-sponsored project of Soviet atheism through three stages.

Initially, the atheist project was mainly political. Following the 1917 October Revolution, the Bolsheviks knew that cleansing Russia of religion would demand the debilitation of the Orthodox patriarchy, which was understood to be a powerful counter-revolutionary threat. During this regime of “militant atheism,” countless clergy and their followers were murdered and imprisoned, religious property was seized by the state, and religious expression was severely limited to the private sphere. While this period was mostly characterized by anti-clericalism, the Bolsheviks also began to produce alternatives to religious establishments in the realm of public life. They constructed “culture clubs,” built planetariums that were conceived of as “theaters of enlightenment,” and transformed cathedrals into anti-religious museums, all in an effort to push the population towards what they saw as the imminence of science and progress. When Stalin was confident that the Church as a political threat to Communist rule was neutralized, the 1940s saw state persecution of religion subside somewhat. Atheism as a government project was largely forgotten until the era of Nikita Khrushchev.

When Khrushchev came to power in 1953, state assessments of the Soviet population found that religion was alive and well—atheism was not as strong as had been anticipated. Smolkin dubs this an era of scientific or ideological atheism, in which atheism was portrayed as the ideological alternative to religion. Governmental organizations that had promoted anti-religious propaganda and scientific education under the Bolsheviks were restructured and redeployed in Khrushchev’s anti-religion campaigns of 1954 and 1958.

Space Race era propaganda centered upon the defeat of religious beliefs by scientific realities. Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin’s first manned space flight was vital to the claims of scientific atheism. A poster from the

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3 Ibid., 179.
4 Ibid., 28.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 35.
7 Ibid., 60.
8 Ibid., 62.
1970s shows an illustration of a cosmonaut floating high above the Earth, holding a space-suited hand to his brow and proclaiming, “There is No God!” Sometimes, state-sponsored scientific lectures convinced people to abandon their belief in God, but audience responses often puzzled atheist officials. For example, when one rural audience was asked what they liked about an astronomy lecture, they replied, “We liked how gloriously God constructed the universe.” Responses like this eventually forced Communist officials to recognize that they knew little about religion or about the purposes it served in the lives of Soviet citizens.

In the last decades of Soviet rule, the atheism project became spiritual. Under Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), officials harnessed social science tools to try once more to understand how and why religion persisted. In addition to observing that baptisms and other religious rites had continued (and even increased in frequency), one of the most troubling findings of this research was that “many Soviet people were growing indifferent to religion and to atheism,” a fact that threatened the posterity of the entire Communist project. In this period of spiritual atheism, new rituals for commemorating life’s stages were created and implemented on a mass scale with hopes of “sacralizing” Soviet life and “creating a bond with the Soviet person from the cradle to the grave.” “Wedding Palaces” and “Palaces of Happiness” were constructed to replace churches as sites where citizens could mark life events. Unexpectedly, Soviet citizens adopted the new Soviet rituals in addition to their traditional religious rituals. For instance, a couple would register their newborn at the Palace of Happiness, and then perform a baptism at the local church as well.

Ultimately, Smolkin asserts that the major failure of Soviet atheism, and the Communist project more broadly, centered on conversion. It was not only the decline of religion that the Communist Party sought, nor the secularization of society, but rather total conversion to another system of belief. Crucially, the Communist Party’s problem with religion was not that it offered universal answers to life’s overarching existential questions, but rather that it offered the wrong answers, which Party officials believed communism had the power to correct. In its efforts to implement

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9 Ibid., 93.
10 Ibid., 98.
11 Ibid., 143.
12 Ibid., 171, 183.
13 Ibid., 192.
14 Ibid., 241.
widespread moral transformation, the Communist Party became a failed religious movement: It tried to convert a population to atheism through political, ideological, and spiritual methods and simply did not gain a sufficient following to preserve itself. Smolkin identifies the 1988 celebration of the Russian Christian millennium under Gorbachev as the decisive moment at which the Communist Party had “given up its monopoly on truth,” a move that destabilized its entire ideological foundation and contributed to its rapid dissolution.

Smolkin’s writing is clear and her arguments are compelling. This book is well-structured and easy to follow, while also providing nuance and depth. Her engagement with historical records is extensive, and she includes ample quotations and examples to support her claims. Smolkin is an adept historian, and her discussion of Soviet cultural remnants—including publications, speeches, propaganda, and popular stories—assists the reader in understanding the larger themes and arguments of her book. The inclusion of images in this text is also highly effective and helps clarify the written narrative.

“Religion,” Smolkin acknowledges, is a “general term,” and she refers to Russian Orthodoxy as the default ethnic and religious category throughout her narrative. Thus, Smolkin does not provide substantial information about the diversity of Soviet religiosity, and as Kevin Tuite notes in his review, those interested in Soviet minority groups will need to seek out additional sources. Further, Smolkin does not extensively flesh out the relationship between the Soviet atheist project and nationalism, nor does she explicitly consider the role these concepts played in Cold War opposition to the United States. However, these themes are consistently present in the narrative’s development, and they would be ripe for further analysis in a subsequent work.

For readers who are unfamiliar with Soviet history, it might be useful to supplement Smolkin’s text with other source materials to gain a general understanding of relevant historical events and concepts to which Smolkin does not devote significant attention. Nevertheless, A Sacred Space is Never Empty is a stimulating read for any student of religion and history. As

15 Ibid., 242.
16 Ibid., 245.
17 Ibid., 17.
Smolkin paints her picture of the Soviet project to replace religion with atheism, she also outlines the amorphous nature of religiosity, and the deeply embedded roots of faith and tradition come to the forefront. Atheist officials discovered that religion was not merely a belief in God that could be erased by sending a man to space, and Smolkin demonstrates that religion and society are interwoven in inexplicable, and seemingly inextricable, ways that are not easily replicated or replaced.

For this reviewer, who spends most of her time discussing what religion is, this text provides a productive opportunity to study an ideological system that defines itself largely by what it is not. Learning about atheism is a fascinating way to enrich one’s knowledge of religion, and vice versa; Smolkin reminds us that the boundaries between conceptual social categories are more porous than we often realize or admit. We will never know whether religion in the Soviet Union might have disappeared organically had the Communist Party not interfered so aggressively in the process. However, it seems that religion is a stubbornly persistent category, and that sacred space is truly never left empty. Smolkin’s impressive first book broadens our perspective on what qualifies as “sacred,” and educates us on the power and limitations of human conviction in driving the great cycles of historical change.
How Does A Buddhist Learn to be a Buddhist?
An Interview With Justin McDaniel

Justin McDaniel is a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and a scholar of Southeast Asian Buddhism.

He spent several years volunteering and living as a monk in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos before attending Harvard Divinity School for a Master of Theological Studies (1998) and a PhD in Sanskrit and Indian Studies (2003). Dr. McDaniel has earned several awards for his innovative, experiential teaching methods. He spoke with Graduate Journal editorial leadership about his undergraduate course offerings, his research advice for graduate students, and his service-oriented approach to scholarship. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

You have taught several courses in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania that might be described as “experiential” in nature. These courses include “Living Deliberately,” where students live an ascetic lifestyle for several months, as well as “Existential Despair,” where students spend four and a half hours in class reading a book each week. So, the first question that we want to ask you: what is the overlap in impact between these two courses? How do they relate? What is the underlying methodology here?

It is actually eight hours that we spend in class, not four and a half! Students read for four and a half hours, but then we discuss and write for three and a half hours after that. It is a big block of time! So, these courses relate in a few ways. First, they both emphasize “single tasking.” When you do something, you do it well. When you eat, you eat. When you read, you read. When you walk, you walk. If we concentrate on single things, it makes it easier to concentrate as monastics do: we concentrate on breathing, on feeling our feet on the ground, on chanting, on prayer, on focused meditation. Since I teach courses on monasticism and asceticism, and I write on...
these subjects, I think it is important for students to not only learn about these things, but to learn from them. This concept was emphasized to me by one of my teachers at Harvard Divinity School. I want my courses to have an experiential aspect as well as a cerebral aspect. I find that students remember things and recall them and can draw on them in times of need—whether emotional need or intellectual need—if there was a sense of urgency at the time they learned them. When there is something essential in life—like eating would be, like exercising your body would be, like warmth would be, or protection from the elements—there can be a sense of urgency, as if “I won’t survive if I don’t have that.” I believe that education can also provide a sense of urgency, a sense that you can’t imagine yourself surviving or operating in life without it.

I also think that every piece of informational knowledge should relate to something emotional and something physical. I always learn better, most people learn better, and psychologists have studied this, if I can link a memory—whether it is a phone number or a person’s face, or an event that happened to me—with an emotional element. This emotion must have a core: it could be sadness, it could be joy, excitement, or something else. And then there is also a physical element. For example, some people need to write new information down when they hear it. There’s something physical there. Often we think writing is cerebral, but it is also a physical act. For other people, physical learning might involve tattooing. Physicality can be very subtle, like a wink or a handshake, or it can be something significant. Learning is enhanced if you coordinate your emotional life, your physical life, and your cerebral intellectual life. Both of my courses encourage students to do that in an experiential way. For each student, this plays out differently. They experience emotions in different ways. They act out physicality in different ways. I am trying to provide an atmosphere where that is not only okay, but it is encouraged.

Finally, I would say these courses are linked in that they provide, I hope, formal and structured safe spaces for conversation wherein it is okay to veer off-topic. Obviously sometimes you need to reel things back in a bit. But students should feel that things that are bothering them—whether it be family, friends, anxiety about the future, anxiety about things in the past—don’t need to be excised from their intellectual life. Unless students want to be private, and of course that is also important. But when they go into careers, whatever they choose to do, most of them will have dynamic lives: families and travel and career and creative pursuits. And all these things won’t be different parts of their lives. If you have a troubled family life, it’s difficult
to concentrate on a creative pursuit like writing or painting. It is difficult to have a productive day job if you physically feel horrible. Life is an organic symbiosis between home life, work life, social life, and private life. We can’t truly separate those things, but we are often forced to separate them because of social convention. So, I want to encourage students, at least while they’re in my classes, to see life as fully integrated.

A lot to think about! So, how does this methodology apply in different ways to different stages of student development? Do you think this sort of lens, this sort of experiential lens, is still valuable for students at the masters and doctoral levels the same way that it is meaningful for students at the undergraduate level?

I’ve never tried this at the graduate level, and graduate school is quite different in terms of self-selection of the students and focus of the courses. Questions that graduate students have, just simply because of their age, their choices, their trajectories, are different from undergraduate questions. You are going to have different things pushing and pulling your life. Many graduate students have anxiety about making money, anxiety about establishing a voice and a reputation in a field, family pressure perhaps, the push of age and physical ability, they have the push of parental pressure or partner pressure. There are a lot of things driving them to get their work completed and to develop their core arguments. But there is also a pull aspect: students are pulled in many directions. They might have multiple advisors who disagree with each other. They might have peers and colleagues pulling them to be on certain panels, on certain publication projects or grant projects, things like that. Also, partners, children, or parents may not only push them, but also pull them away [with questions like], “Oh why don’t you take the night off? Why don’t you take the week off? Do you have to go to this conference?”

Undergraduates are vaguer. They are kind of dreaming about what their life will be like. I have sophomores who have no idea if they want to go to medical school, if they want to do social work, or if they want to teach literature. There’s a much wider realm of possibilities for them, if they are lucky. There are also undergraduates for whom this number of choices can be overwhelming. Do they want to make their life about social activism, intellectual pursuits, or about power and influence? Those all seem very different. The difference between a nineteen-year-old and a twenty-nine-year-old is only ten years, but the amounts and types of pressure on them are
completely different. Maybe an equivalent would be a twenty-nine-year-old graduate student saying, “This type of yoga makes me feel good,” whereas a nineteen-year-old might say, “I think I should exercise more.” As a graduate student, you have more specific needs and more specific ways of dealing with those needs. The funny thing is that the difference between a twenty-nine-year-old and a thirty-nine-year-old is not that different. I have graduate students in their thirties and forties who have pretty much the same anxieties as those in their late twenties, early thirties. I don’t see a lot of difference. I mean, biologically sometimes if they want to have children. But it’s funny that the difference between the late teen and the late twenty is huge. And it’s not because they are necessarily less mature, it’s because the push and pull differences are so big. There is also a huge difference between someone at an elite four-year undergraduate university and someone who has a high school degree, works a job, and leads an adult life. The difference between two such nineteen-year-olds is huge. They have different pressures. I work a lot with community college students, volunteer teaching, I do some consulting with students who are seniors in high school and are not necessarily considering college. It is a very different set of pressures.

What you could do at the graduate level is implement different “thought experiments.” What I like about graduate students is that they’ll do things that have nothing to do with course credit or grades. They’ll do things because they’re intellectually interested in them, and they’ll pursue things for self-motivated reasons. That’s what I mean by “self-selected.” They love history, or they love art, or they love certain questions in their field. No matter if they’re being graded, they’ll pursue their interests. They have that cerebral push and pull. Whereas for undergraduates, you need to offer grades and credit sometimes to get them to do things, because they haven’t quite figured out what they want or what they need. They simply haven’t had as much experience. For graduate students, I could say, “We’re going to do a thought experiment, we’re going to get together on Tuesdays and just write and workshop.” Graduate students will do that. There is no grade, but they want to be involved in intellectual pursuits.

Because this is a graduate journal, we would love to hear a little bit more about your advice for graduate students! You received your doctoral degree from Harvard’s Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies in 2003, and you also earned a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School in 1998. Your doctoral dissertation focused on Buddhist Nissaya texts in Northern Thailand and Laos
between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Nissaya texts were written by monastic teachers to assist their students in the analyzation and explanation of Pali literature to both monastic and lay audiences. In your preparation for this dissertation, you studied several ancient South Asian languages, including Sanskrit and Pali. However, you have also published multiple books which tackle topics relevant to the contemporary Buddhist world. Do you see these books—including most recently Architects of Buddhist Leisure, which deals with what you call “contemporary socially disengaged Buddhism”—as an evolution on your education in historical Buddhism? How might you advise budding scholars of religion to frame current research so that it is useful to evolution in their own future work?

I’m not a great planner! I mean, I have a vague idea. I’m working on three book projects right now. One very imminent, and two quite vague. I might not finish any of them. I might completely change them. One project I was working on earlier this year was completely derailed because my advisor passed away, and so I ended up spending the year editing his last book. I often get derailed, and in that case, it was a labor of love and I’m glad I did it. But this often happens. Articles and book ideas have come from places I haven’t expected: a conversation with a colleague, a conversation with a student, a book that I read outside of my field, a conversation with my child. It’s hard for me to plan, and I would love to say that I planned everything, but I haven’t. It’s been a lot of circumstance. As the Buddhists would say, “dependent co-arising;” many factors coming together in a particular moment.

That said, sometimes I look back. I had to do this recently because I participated in a project with Charles Prebish [Professor Emeritus, Buddhist Studies, Pennsylvania State University] to write a short biography of my work over the last twenty years. Many Buddhist scholars did this, I think a hundred of us. That was one prompt. Another was the National University of Singapore Press and Kyoto University Press asked me, two or three years ago, to publish a book of collected articles. I had to start thinking about how I would introduce that collection. And it is funny because the title of that forthcoming book is Wayward Distractions. However, because of reviewing, and because of these two prompts, I’ve realized that there is one burning question in my studies—and maybe in Religious Studies generally. I don’t think this is specific to Buddhism. And this was certainly the motivating question of my dissertation, and it is amazing that the main question of my
dissertation has propelled me over twenty years. Now, as you said, the subjects of my books and articles are incredibly different. Even the methods are different: ethnographic, material culture, text critical, historical. But the question that drives me is very simple: How does a Buddhist learn to be a Buddhist? I would be equally interested in the question of how a Catholic—I am a Catholic—learns to be a Catholic. How does a Jew learn to be a Jew? How does a Muslim learn to be a Muslim?

I don’t know if I made a mistake, looking back, because I didn’t write my dissertation as a book. I wrote it as an eight-hundred-plus-page behemoth, and it was certainly not going to be published that way. Only two chapters came out of my dissertation and into my first book. But the question remained the same: How do monks and nuns learn Buddhism? They don’t have a set curriculum, they don’t have a set series of exams, well, not until 1902, and even then, only about two percent of monks and nuns have taken those exams. They learn through archival and historical research, and through a lot of these Nissaya texts and other types of manuscripts. These mixed Pali, and in some cases Sanskrit, vernacular manuscripts. In my second book, I thought, “Well, I’ve learned a good amount about how monks and nuns do this, so how do lay people learn to be Buddhist?” That involved not only looking at historical texts and moments, but also at comic books, ghost stories, film, amulets, chants, funerals, weddings, television and radio programs, etc. In the latest book, Architects of Buddhist Leisure, I was concerned with the question of how lay people and monastics learn things when they don’t realize they’re learning them. Meaning, not when they’re at a funeral, not when they’re at school, not at a Buddhist celebration. How do they learn outside of monastic and formal religious settings? I looked at monuments, public parks, amusement parks, museums, libraries, public holidays, etc. Socially disengaged Buddhism: People don’t consider themselves as actively engaged in Buddhism when they’re riding a Buddhist roller coaster, having a picnic at a Buddhist park, or spending a date at a museum with Buddhist objects. How are they learning to be Buddhist in these settings?

In my next project, I try to expand beyond Buddhism, looking at monks and nuns in a Catholic-Buddhist comparison. How do monks and nuns learn through art, gardening, liquor-making, or architecture? I’ve been collecting information for the past couple of years, and I want to make this a comparative project for the first time. But again, the fundamental question remains: how do they learn? Or perhaps, how do they learn when they are focused on their studies?
Our next question returns to the historical aspect of your research: How important do you think it is for scholars of “historical religion” to be educated on and engaged with modern iterations of the traditions they study? Should scholars of historical religion be more involved in advising, for example, United States policy decisions that have ramifications for contemporary international religious communities? To what extent should scholars of religion advocate for the communities they study—particularly when those communities are under threat? What would that advocacy look like? How would it be accomplished?

You know, I am probably not the best person to ask about this! I haven’t felt a need to do this. Scholars of Tibetan Buddhism deal with this question more often, on how to advocate politically, environmentally, and socially for Tibetan refugees or communities under threat from China. And certainly, there has been a huge debate in Buddhist Studies between historians, textual scholars, and more modern scholars. There are historical scholars of Tibetan Buddhism who have advocated for the Tibetan people more broadly, and particularly for saving Tibetan monasteries. There are scholars of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity who deal with this as well. That doesn’t mean I haven’t dealt with these questions, but—perhaps because of the way I was raised in a very strict and traditional Catholic family—I approach my work with a service mentality as opposed to an advocacy or an activism mentality. Meaning, I am not so sure that my opinions matter, or that I have a superior way of understanding things politically or socially.

And so, I try to be of service. For example, since 2004, I’ve led the Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Studies Association. I was chair of the association for eight or nine years, and for all my time, I have run the listserv that reaches about twelve hundred people. I send out social, political, activist, and academic information about the field. Instead of my voice, I give a voice to these twelve hundred members. They can share news and raise awareness of diverse issues, from human trafficking to dictatorship in Thailand to environmental destruction. I also try to promote the work of local scholars in Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand: reviewing books, doing translations, editing local scholars’ work so it is published more widely. I am the editor of the Journal of Lao Studies with the Center for Lao Studies, which is an effort to help local Laotian scholars, who don’t have many chances for international exchange, to travel abroad to conferences. So, it’s not that I don’t have opinions, but I’m not enamored with my own opinions. I would
rather just provide a forum for others. I was a bartender for many years, I still tend bar on occasion, and I still run events where I bartend. I like it. I like inviting lots of people with lots of opinions, needs, and agendas and letting them get to know each other and providing a space where they can talk and interact. But I don’t interact: I wipe down the bar and mix drinks in the background.

Such a compelling image! On the subject of listservs and global technology...you founded the Thai Digital Monastery Project (TDM), which focuses on the digitization of Thai Buddhist art, architecture, film, text, and other sources of cultural media. Scholars and translators from around the world contribute to the TDM in English, Thai, French, German, Japanese, Lao, and Chinese. Given this experience, how do you think scholars of religion can leverage technology to make this field accessible to a wider array of students, while still maintaining the integrity of and respect for the traditions they are studying? When scholars digitize material culture, what obligations do they have to the religious communities that created this culture? How do these obligations change when a community is extinct versus active and practicing?

The TDM is a project I did in 2007. It has changed a lot because since then, technology has changed! We received grants from the Luce Foundation and the Mellon Foundation to help digitize and provide free web access to about eighteen thousand manuscripts. This is a project started by Harald Hundius and David Wharton in Laos and Northern Thailand. I was part of this early on, in Laos in 1999. Over time, I’ve helped with grants and facilitation. UC Riverside, my former institution, helped us preserve a massive amount of literature electronically. The people who access it most are local scholars, monks, and nuns in Southeast Asia, which is great. And many of these manuscripts are in danger of being lost or destroyed, so I’m proud to have been a part of that project, and to have helped raise money for it. We also helped employ about thirty people in Laos and in Thailand, and this was an opportunity not only to give local scholars employment, but to give people a chance to handle this material and to promote their own culture. I have also been closely associated with the Price Digital Humanities Lab at Penn, and my students are becoming more interested in 3-D atmospheres, digital renderings, and virtual reality.

These projects are visually exciting and enticing to students, but more
importantly, digitization is important because if you can’t travel, if you have physical disabilities, if you have financial difficulties, if you aren’t a student at a university, you can still have access. I want to help do my part democratizing and evening the playing field in academia. I know a lot of scholars are not that way, and I respect that. I was certainly hesitant when I first began, but I’m also becoming a much greater advocate of online teaching, if it’s done properly, to give students of any age, including adult learners, access to education no matter what their resources are. And as access to the internet and computer technology spreads, for better or for worse, across the globe, and more importantly, across class lines, people might gain a little bit of the massive amount of privilege that a person like me or a student at Harvard might have. And that privilege shouldn’t be something that makes you guilt-ridden, or something that makes you feel the need to apologize, but it gives you a responsibility to say, “I am enjoying the benefits of a life of intellectual exploration and wouldn’t it be nice if everyone had those opportunities as well?” There are so many terrible things in the world, so much suffering, I think this is the least we can do, to share the wondering and wandering that we so often take for granted.
CONTRIBUTERS

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