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Cover image: *Death of Socrates* (1880).

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The Experience of Pleasure in Maimonides's Ethics

Stephanie Hutzler

Moses Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon) was a twelfth-century Jewish philosopher, physician, and rabbi who wrote extensively on the health of the body and soul, all with the intention of achieving one goal: to know God (*Eight Chapters,* in Weis and Butterworth 75). The ethical and medical works of Maimonides that are cited in this essay include *Laws Concerning Character Traits*, *Eight Chapters*, *Guide of the Perplexed*, *Treatise on the Regime of Health, Medical Aphorisms of Moses*, and a selection from his *Mishneh Torah: Book of Holiness.* All of his works illuminate the method for knowing God, which is achieved through obedience to the Law. Maimonides says "The Law as a whole aims at two things: the well-being of the soul and the well-being of the body" (*Guide of the Perplexed,* in Weis and Butterworth 139). If one's life is centered around this ultimate goal of knowing God, maintaining a healthy body and soul is crucial. No action is ever trivial, frivolous, profane or done without consideration of how it will influence one's health. All acts are done with the idea of *knowing God* in mind. But if Maimonides instructs that each act should aim at what is useful, whatever accomplishes the ultimate goal, then what becomes of pleasure? Is pleasure to be enjoyed only by default, as a mere consequence of something that is first done out of devotion to God? Typically, in his view, the role of pleasure in one's life should be limited to its enjoyment only as a gratuity in the course of properly caring for one's body and soul.

According to Maimonides, no act should be done for pleasure *alone*, although there seems to be one apparent exception to this rule: pleasure may become the goal of an act when it is necessary in the course of medical treatment (*Eight Chapters* 75). This means that there will be times when one's health fails, and the proper medical treatment is to permit actions that are purely for pleasure, but only in order to regain health. Regulating the balance of pleasure in one's life is essential, always making sure one's compass is pointing toward God. Maimonides strongly cautions against acts that are done *solely* for the purpose of gratification, for if there is no higher appeal of knowing God, one is most definitely on the path of physical and moral corruption because one has consented to live outside

the confines and the life-giving safety of the Law.

Maimonides's attitude toward the experience of pleasure at times seems apathetic, mainly because he promotes it as the result of maintaining one's health in obedience to Law. Most of the pleasures Maimonides discusses in his writings are experienced through the body—such as eating, drinking, and sex—but he also understands that pleasures can be intellectual, such as the pleasure that comes from conversing. Maimonides says that if we find something to be pleasant in the course of carrying out "what is most useful," then *so be it* in his words: "If it happens to be pleasant, so be it; and if it happens to be repugnant, so be it"—thus indicating his indifferent attitude toward pleasurable or even painful things that come to one in the course of maintaining one's health (*Eight Chapters* 75). Maimonides's primary concern is obedience to the Law, not whether something is first pleasurable or painful. Therefore, duty always dictates when pleasures are warranted, not desire alone.

When food and drink are pursued merely for pleasure, Maimonides believes that it leads to one's ruin: "Gross eating is like deadly poison for the body of any man; it is a root of all illness" (*Laws Concerning Character Traits,* in Weis and Butterworth 39; hereafter cited as *Laws*). He gives comprehensive lists of foods and their effects on the body in chapter 4 of *Laws Concerning Character Traits*. Although he writes about *what* to eat, he is equally concerned about *how* to eat as well. He starts off with some basic things in the fourth chapter, such as eating only when one is hungry and drinking only when one is thirsty. Even when eating a healthy meal, Maimonides counsels that one should stop eating when the stomach is three-fourths full. It is also important to let one's food digest before engaging in any kind of physical activities. So once we know *how* to eat, we must also account for *what* we eat. Maimonides is concerned with what specific foods do to the body, since one can use foods to keep the body in balance. The foods Maimonides considers to be poison and *never* proper to eat are salted stale fish, salted stale cheese, truffles and mushrooms, salted stale meat, wine from the press, and cooked food that has been kept until its odor disappears. To avoid old, salty, moldy, or stale food is probably always wise. Now when one begins a meal, he notes, certain fruits such as grapes, pears, figs, and melons should be eaten first because they loosen the

bowels, and then after a meal he suggests fruits such as pomegranates, quinces, and apples because they harden the bowels (ibid. 37). This type of directive really highlights the precise and detailed nature of his ethics. He also gives advice on what to eat according to the weather, depending on whether it is rainy, dry, hot, or cold. For example, Maimonides advises that warm foods should be eaten in the rainy season with lots of condiments. With regard to wine or alcohol, he thinks it should only to be used for medical purposes, such as to loosen the stool, and anyone who becomes drunk from overindulgence "loses his wisdom" (42). Excessive alcohol consumption not only corrupts the body; it poisons the mind as well. Maimonides says that man's "only purpose in eating and drinking shall be to keep his body and limbs healthy" (35). Maimonides knows that diet plays a major role in the health of the body, and one must be careful not only in the choice of the food, but when and how it should be eaten.

Conversation can also be seen as an activity that, when done solely for pleasure, misses its mark of knowing God: "A man should speak only about what is useful for his soul or about what wards off harm from his soul or body" (*Eight Chapters* 76–77). Maimonides mentions the saying from the *Mishnah* (written Jewish oral laws), "Silence is a fence around wisdom," which he considers the pious man's way of conducting himself, lest he fall into sin upon the multiplication of his words (*Laws* 32–33). Every word spoken is accounted for by God, even the private and possibly lewd talk between a husband and wife during sexual intercourse (ibid. 43). Therefore, a wise man would be prudent to speak as little as possible. In speaking only what is useful through so few words, the content also becomes much richer. For Maimonides, less can definitely be more when it comes to conversation.

Maimonides believes that all pleasures should be experienced as a consequence of right action, which includes the idea that pleasure may be directly pursued in the course of medical treatment. The language of "medical treatment" may create the impression that Maimonides rarely permits pleasure, but this is not the case. One does not need a doctor's permission to pursue pleasure as a goal in the case of medical treatment. One has a responsibility to maintain the health of one's body and soul in service of the Lord, and in the best case to use one's own discretion to determine which things harm one and which things help (*Medical Aphorisms,* in Rosner

74). Maimonides thinks that proper care of the soul includes continually weighing one's actions daily, so one may adjust one's aim if one has fallen too much into pleasure, as opposed to pursuing God (*Eight Chapters* 73). There is no correct amount of pleasure to follow as a medical treatment, but one is encouraged to maintain a cheerful disposition in life in order to remain healthy. For example, when someone is unhealthy in such a manner that he or she loses appetite, for whatever reason, Maimonides suggests that this person be permitted to eat anything he or she likes, whatever the person finds *pleasurable*, so he or she is able to regain health and become strong again (ibid. 75). Once homeostasis is achieved, one would then adjust one's aim from pleasurable foods back to foods that may be unpleasant to the taste but healthy to the body.

Rest and relaxation are also major fundamentals in keeping the body and soul healthy. If a man is constantly toiling and never allows himself to enjoy any leisure time or activities, he may become weary and dull, and therefore unable to serve his highest goal. Maimonides believes that "the soul needs to rest and to do what relaxes the senses, such as looking at beautiful decorations and objects, so that the weariness be removed from it" (ibid. 77). He recommends walking in a garden and listening to beautiful music when one's mood is melancholic. He also recommends decorating things, if it increases one's health by giving delight to one's soul. Maimonides mentions a collective and common saying about attractive and beautiful things and how they directly affect the mind: "An attractive dwelling, an attractive wife, attractive utensils, and a bed prepared for the disciples of the wise give delight to the mind of a man" (ibid.). When one aims at these pleasures in order to be healthy, one's pleasure actually becomes a service to God (*Laws* 35). This "pleasure as a service to God" is probably the best way to understand how Maimonides thinks of pleasure being utilized properly in one's life. As a service, it not only keeps one happy and healthy, but moves one closer to God. For example, when a man is physically sick and must stay in bed, the pleasure of rest is actually done for the Lord, and it is good that he enjoys it and not feel guilty for resting. Maimonides believes that the pleasures of rest and relaxation truly worship God. He is always considering whether an action will move one closer to God, or further away from him.

Maimonides believes that although one may experience pleasure during sexual intercourse, it is not the goal of sex, nor

should it ever be. Maimonides finds that the goal of sex, when directed towards the aim of knowing God, has only two objectives: to procreate, and as a health treatment *for men* (*Laws* 35). He elaborates on this ethic: "Therefore, he shall not have sexual intercourse every time he has the desire, but whenever he knows he needs to discharge sperm in accordance with the directive of medicine or to have offspring." He further explains there must be an *involuntary* arousal of the genitals, and he may engage in sex if it does not go away, even if he distracts himself (ibid. 35, 40). Maimonides projects the attitude that a man should be *reluctant* to have sex, and should only engage in it when it becomes an overwhelming bodily desire that he cannot rationally master. Maimonides is clearly speaking to a male audience with regard to the *second* aim of sex as a health treatment to discharge sperm. He does not describe any kind of equivalent sexual health treatment for females, or refer to sex as a requirement for female health. However, he does link female sexual arousal to the body in the same way he links it to a man's. Maimonides mentions a woman's ovaries as being the source of lust for sex and states she will not "receive a male for pleasure" without them (*Medical Aphorisms,* in Rosner 76). He makes the link, but does not describe a further duty or responsibility she has to *her* arousal comparable to what he prescribes for a man to do.

Maimonides states that the multitude of men engage in sex *not* for the two proper reasons, as he claims in one of his health treatises: "The behavior of all men regarding coitus is known. And that is, that there is not one who uses it for the sake of the regimen of health, or for the sake of procreation, but merely for pleasure; thus they lust until fatigued, at all times, and at every opportunity" (*Regime of Health,* in Rosner 47–48). Maimonides's remark indicates his revulsion over men who indulge in sex purely for gratification, especially to the detriment of their own health. He also claims that semen is the strength of a man's body, so that "whenever too much is ejaculated, the body decays, its strength is spent, and its life destroyed" (*Laws* 40). He further mentions a list of consequences that arise from excessive copulation, such as a general reduction in strength, the eyes becoming dim, an increase of bodily odor, the loss of facial hair (head, eyebrows, and eyelashes), the increase of beard, armpit, and leg hair, and finally the loss of teeth! When the pleasure of sex becomes the main goal, Maimonides maintains that it destroys

the health of the body, making it unfit to serve its highest purpose, knowing God.

Maimonides says that when the husband desires sex, even with the correct motives, the activity is still contingent upon the wife's willingness. He states, "Both of them (or one of them) shall not be drunk, lethargic, or sad. She should not be asleep and he should not force her if she is unwilling, but [intercourse shall take place] when both wish it and in a state of mutual joy" (*Laws* 43). Maimonides considers the wife's libido when discussing the conduct of reciprocal sexual pleasure, but he omits to say if her arousal fits in with his objections that sex should be done for the purpose of procreation or as a health regime for men. The wife does help play a role in alleviating her husband's suffering in the case of his involuntary arousal; by entering the bedchamber as an antidote when he feels "a heaviness in his loins" (ibid. 40). Perhaps she does desire children, or willingly participates in his health treatment, but Maimonides does not address a woman's sexual motivation as he does a man's. He does not judge or condemn female desire *if* it is present when the husband approaches her.

Maimonides gives an account of unscrupulous female sexual desire in his *Book of Holiness,* from his *Mishneh Torah*, which includes regulations for sex. In this example, he gives a judgment upon a woman's sexual desire: "the Sages have said that in the case of a woman who is so barefaced as to brazenly demand intercourse, or seduces a man in order to make him marry her or persuade her husband to have intercourse with her when his intention is to visit his other wife, or does not wait three months after the death of her husband before remarrying—with the result that the parentage of the resulting child is in doubt—all children born of such women become renegades and sinners who become separated in the sufferings of exile" (*Book of Holiness,* in Rosner 103). We are given a very clear picture of what a woman is *not* supposed to do regarding her sexual practices: initiate intercourse, use her sexuality to gain a husband, persuade her husband to spend his sexual energy on her when his intention is otherwise, or have sex in such a way that she cannot tell whom the father of her child is. Therefore, she is expected to conceal her desire. Maimonides knows it exists, but it should not be present outside of her husband's approach. She does not act on her desire, but waits upon her husband. She is passive, but responsive.

Maimonides gives us what he

believes to be honorable examples of both male and female sexuality and the ethics of their interactions involving pleasure, but I contend that he fails to account for female orgasm, and in the wider scope appears as a misogynist for denying women the right to initiate sex with their husbands. For men, sexual pleasure is appropriately experienced in order to procreate or to fulfill medical treatment. Unambiguously, a man *must* ejaculate; and simultaneously he orgasms. The justifications are health and children. A man cannot disentangle his orgasm from his duty. But what of a woman's sexual pleasure? Is a woman permitted to pursue sex or orgasm with her husband? Would this in any way serve her highest purpose—to know God? Or does Maimonides consider it as something superfluous? We don't quite know what he thinks about her satisfaction, so we are prone to think that he does not care. Dr. Ruth Westheimer, the famous self-proclaimed Jewish sexologist, asserts that some ancient rabbis advised that "if a man brings his wife to orgasm before he ejaculates he will be rewarded with a son—a reward thought to be as precious to the man as an orgasm is satisfying to a woman" (Westheimer and Mark 4). Although this still speaks volumes about ancient Jewish culture being terribly misogynistic (which she mentions will sound very harsh to the modern observer and should), it at least puts the female orgasm on the map. It also brings us back to Maimonides's idea that sex is primarily a duty that is meant to create children—even if the ancients have added the lore of the female orgasm being connected with the reward of a son.

Maimonides believes a woman has little to no sexual authority in the marital relationship other than to give her consent. Honorable female sexuality is meant to exist in a state of dormancy. Maimonides does not support *onah*, when the wife desires sex, as a legitimate duty to be fulfilled. David Biale, author of *Eros and the Jews,* writes of Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah* and medical writings: "As his critics were to note, he fails to mention the commandment of *onah* in these passages" (Biale 92). Biale also states Maimonides has been criticized as being a "misogynist philosopher" because of his lack of concern for female sexual pleasure in his writings (95). In his book *Health and Medicine in the Jewish Tradition,* David Feldman mentions some Jewish scholars have asserted that the curse upon Eve in the Book of Genesis—that her desire will be for her husband and "he shall rule over you"—accounts for the sexual dynamic between men and women (Feldman

61). This attitude is consistent with what Maimonides teaches in his ethics: that sexual intercourse is to be regulated and initiated by the husband. The scholars are a bit more sympathetic towards the wife's situation than Maimonides, for they insist that a husband has a *mitzvah onah,* a duty to ease his wife's shame of sexual desire: "When a man notices that his wife is desirous, then he now has a conjugal mitzvah. . . . He should save her, so to speak, from this 'curse' by initiating sexual relations" (ibid.). *Onah* was also considered a commandment by Rabad (Abraham ben David of Posquieres), one of Maimonides's main proponents and contemporaries. Rabad believed that because the wife is an extension of the husband's body, he not only has a duty to satisfy his desire, but hers as well (Biale 96). *Onah* is viewed by Rabad not only as the husband consenting to his wife's desire, but fulfilling it as much as she desires. *Onah* is all about pleasing the wife and, it should be noted, *onah* is a commandment given to the husband, not the wife.

Jewish women were excluded from many of the sexual laws, such as ones regarding masturbation. "Just as women were ignored and left out of most other aspects of the religio-legal restrictions, they were ignored by many of the sexual laws as well. Since the rabbis were highly exact, their silence implies that women may indeed masturbate" (Westheimer and Mark 30–31). Maimonides writes mainly to a male audience regarding sexual practices, but this is because he is echoing the Law. He thinks the husband has more responsibility with respect to sexual conduct because he is the one given the sexual laws. Therefore, any moral or physical corruption due to the misuse of sex should fall squarely on a man's shoulders, given that he is the one who is always supposed to initiate relations.

Maimonides understands that sustaining the intention of "knowing God" as the motive behind all of one's actions is indeed "very lofty and is difficult to reach" (*Eight Chapters* 77). He nevertheless praises it, and admits a person like this is akin to the prophets. Those who aim to know God are much like the prophets because prophets received direct revelation from God; they *knew* God better than anyone else. Even though this way is difficult, Maimonides finds that this is what the scriptures teach, as he quotes Solomon: "In all your ways know Him" and he mentions this tractate from the *Mishnah*: "Let all your deeds be for the sake of heaven" (*Eight Chapters* 78). Jewish daily practice is about God, all day, every

day, and with this in mind, one cannot go wrong. Maimonides believes that in choosing what is only useful for our bodies, such as the healthiest food and drink, and engaging in sex *only* for procreation or for health reasons, we do what is commanded by the Law. Pleasure is definitely not forbidden in Maimonides's ethics, but he strongly advises one to guard against being corrupted by one's animal drives. Through obedience, one comes to the knowledge of God. If one focuses on God, one will live a life of moderation, neither deprived of pleasure nor overindulgent, but with just the right balance in order to be happy, healthy, and wise. Enjoy the pleasure, Maimonides counsels, and yet be prudent to correct the action if your health begins to fail.

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Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Human Nature

Conor McGarry

Machiavelli's vision of the state and the role of its principal leader was based on his experiences in politics, which strongly shaped his views on human nature. In *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli sees humans as selfish beings motivated by either what they can gain or what they can keep. Human beings, according to Machiavelli, are creatures who only care about advancing their own interests, even if that might conflict with others' interests. This is where the role of the prince comes in. The prince is supposed to restrain the ability and motivation of individuals or factions from advancing their own power by either removing that threat or by pacifying the threat. Machiavelli's advice for a ruler throughout *The Prince* is a consequence of his preconceived view of human nature.

In the early part of *The Prince* in which Machiavelli treats the acquisition of new principalities, he discusses how the circumstances beforehand determine how the new ruler should act. In chapter 3, entitled "Composite Principalities," which are new states, Machiavelli states: "Men willingly change their ruler, expecting to fare better. This expectation induces them to take up arms against him: but they only deceive themselves, and they learn from experience that they have made matters worse" (7). In order for a prince to take hold of a territory, he needs to have the goodwill of the people or else he cannot hold it. The prince must make sure to keep the laws and customs that were already in place in order to not anger the populace. (7) As there was already a system in place that the populace was used to, it is to the benefit to the prince not to intervene with that system.

Chapter 7 of *The Prince* discusses new principalities that are acquired with the help of fortune and foreign arms. For Machiavelli, private citizens who become emperors face several problems. These rulers rely on the goodwill and fortune of those who elevated them, which he sees as unstable—since those same people who put one in power can also take it away. For Machiavelli, private citizens are incapable of commanding unless they have considerable abilities because they do not have loyal troops of their own (27). Unless they are able to preserve their power quickly, they will be destroyed. Machiavelli goes on to talk about Cesare Borgia and his father Pope Alexander VI, who sought to create power for his son. Alexander created disorder, and by throwing the other states into disorder, as he was able to incite the Venetians into bringing the French into Italy. For the Pope, who was able to crush the Romagna and Colonna, his position was threatened by the loyalty of his troops and the policy of France. To solve this, he won the allegiance of the Orsini and Colonna factions in Rome by giving their highborn members offices and commissions, and they eventually became

loyal to the duke (29–30).

Fortune and skill are not the only ways an individual can achieve power, according to Machiavelli; other methods for becoming a prince include criminal and evil means, and when a private citizen becomes the prince of his native city with the approval of his fellow citizens. Chapter 8 addresses those who come to power by evil means; Machiavelli does not discuss the rights or wrongs of the matter, but whether these examples are to be followed (35). He proceeds to discuss how rulers who were able to seize power violently were able to hold onto it, while others who did the same could not (39). For Machiavelli it is a matter of using cruelty in an effective matter. Cruelty is used well when it is employed once for all and when one's safety depends on it, whereas cruelty is used badly when it grows in intensity over time rather than disappearing (ibid.). Machiavelli is not concerned with whether the use of cruelty is moral or not, but whether it is being used in an effective manner. If a ruler does seize power in a violent manner, he must inflict the pain on his enemies right away because if he does not neither the prince nor his subjects will feel secure. If it is not employed in a limited manner, the use of cruelty will bite the prince back, as it angers the citizenry who are given a reason to hate the prince and go against him (40).

Machiavelli's view on the constitutional principality, in which the citizens elect a citizen to power, further displays Machiavelli's view on human nature and politics. There were two distinct groups that made up a principality, and who had competing interests: the nobility and the people. The people do not want to be oppressed by the nobles, whereas the nobles do want to oppress the people. Both groups try to appoint individual citizens who will represent the interests of either the people or the nobility. The prince who is put into power by the nobility has trouble maintaining his power, as he is among equals and cannot easily command the nobility; while a prince put into power by the people finds himself alone and without friends (41). For Machiavelli, pleasing the nobles was the better option. The nobles had more foresight and could protect their own interests, and take sides on who will protect their interests (42). This conflict between the nobility and the people was seen as a core problem that divided a city-state or any other nation, as past empires and nations have had to struggle with the clash of interests between the two main classes.

Machiavelli's view of mercenaries in *The Prince* also shows how he viewed human nature. Machiavelli viewed mercenaries negatively for several reasons. Their selfish nature was the problem, for this meant that mercenaries were not loyal to the state but to themselves. They were disunited, power hungry, undisciplined, and disloyal. They avoid defeat just as long as they avoid battle and are brave among their friends and cowards among the enemy. There is nothing that is keeping them on the field besides what little they are paid, and that is not enough to motivate them to die for

you. They are eager to serve in the army when there is no war, but when there is a war they are eager to disperse (52). Mercenaries were unreliable because of their selfish nature, Machiavelli argues throughout the text, in that mercenaries are motivated by what they can get out of the ruler and have no loyalty besides their pay.

Machiavelli also had a negative view of mercenary commanders. According to Machiavelli, mercenaries commanders are either skilled in war or not. If they are skilled in war, they are not to be trusted, as they are anxious to advance their own interests either forcing you, their employer, or forcing others against your own wishes (52). If the commander is incompetent, he will still bring you ruin. For Machiavelli, armed forces should be under the control of either a prince or a republic, as one or the other must assert command of the troops themselves. When a commander is incompetent, he should be changed, whereas if he is competent, his authority should be limited (53). Machiavelli does not advocate an independent commander, as they are again motivated by their interests and how they are able to advance themselves, hence are not loyal to the state (52). Having the prince or one from the city-state commanding instead of a mercenary ensures that the interests of the state are met in an effective manner.

Machiavelli was not concerned with the idealistic world but the realistic world. He goes on to say that many have dreamed up republics that never existed; the space between how one *should* live and how one *does* live is so wide that when someone does not do what is needed, they move toward self-destruction. A man who wants to act in a moral manner comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous (65). Therefore, if a ruler wishes to maintain power, he must be prepared not to be moral and to make use of this according to need. A man is judged for various qualities, which earn him either praise or condemnation, which could include being called generous or miserly (66). Everyone can agree on which qualities are the most desirable, but because of the nature of the world, princes cannot have all of those qualities. A prince has to practical in order to avoid the evil reputation that is attached to certain vices, and also to avoid those vices that are not so dangerous, but if he cannot do the latter, then he needs not to worry about it. He must not flinch when he is accused of certain vices which are necessary for the safety of the state; sometimes, if he practices certain virtues they will ruin him, whereas if he practices certain vices they will reward him. Machiavelli was not concerned about what man and society *should* be, but what man and society *are* in the real world, and for him the actual nature of man and society make evident that the prince must be strong.

Machiavelli heavily discusses the concept of cruelty in *The Prince* and how it is to be used in an effective manner. In chapter 17, he writes that a prince must not worry if he gets a reputation for cruelty as long as his subjects are

united and loyal (70). He also states that it is better to be feared than loved, based on his generalization of humanity. He states that human beings are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers who shun danger and are greedy. While they are treated well, they are yours; they will pledge their lives and their property when the danger is remote, but when the prince is in danger they turn away (71). Machiavelli also goes on to state that any prince who has come to depend entirely on promises of support, and has taken no other precautions, ensures his own ruin, as friendship bought with money and not with skill does not last and yields nothing in the end. He goes on to state that men worry less about doing an injury to a loved one than someone they fear, as love is brought by a sense of gratitude, which is easily broken, whereas fear is effective because of the dread of punishment (ibid.). This helps to highlight a central theme of the book: that men are primarily motivated by their own self-interest and act out of either gaining a benefit or receiving a punishment.

Machiavelli also states that a prince should not be honest all the time, as that is a virtue that will also harm him. Great princes have been able to achieve great things when they trick men with their cunning and overcome those who go by honest dealings. A good ruler cannot honor his word when it places him at a disadvantage and when the reasons for which he made a promise no longer exist (74). Machiavelli's feels that this is necessary because a man will not keep his word to you, so why should you keep your word to him? The prince has plenty of reasons to mask his true colors. People are so simple that there will always be someone who can be tricked into seeing the prince as a man of integrity, even if the prince does not actually have those qualities (75). Since most people are not able to grasp your true nature, they are easy to trick. Machiavelli is again not concerned about the moral thing but the most effective thing to do, as most people will say anything to advance themselves, and the prince has no reason to be honest when everyone around him is also dishonest.

The Prince is full of statements that help to highlight Machiavelli's view on human nature, as his preconceived notion of human nature determines the actions that a prince must take. Human beings are not only selfish, according to Machiavelli, but in most cases are evil, and so a prince has no reason to be moral. The prince should eliminate threats when necessary and not rely on anyone else to help him achieve his aims, as those people helping him are also advancing their interest—possibly against the prince. The prince must do whatever is necessary to maintain the safety and security of the state, as this is the nature of the world and there is no point in attempting to change that. Whether an action is right or wrong is not as important as whether that action is useful and productive for the interests of the state and the prince.

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The Gospel of *Jane Eyre*: Misinterpretations and Charlotte Brontë's Christian Imperative

Andy Lara

An 1848 review of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* reads: "To say that *Jane Eyre* is positively immoral or antichristian, would be to do its writer an injustice. Still it wears a questionable aspect. The choice is still to be made, and he who should determine it . . . would do literature and society some service" ("From *The Christian Remembrancer"* 450). This paper will propose an alternative interpretation of Edward Fairfax Rochester, the owner of Thornfield and Jane Eyre's employer and suitor, thus addressing the confusion of critics, an effect of a misreading of Rochester. As seen in this review, *Jane Eyre's* moral agenda has been misinterpreted many times. These misinterpretations mirror misreadings/misinterpretations that characters in the novel make about Jane. On the view that Jane Eyre sets herself up as a Christ-like savior, the feminist claim that Jane Eyre's development is the point of the novel falls apart. Ultimately, the novel's main task is the salvation of Rochester, an allegorical figure on whom Brontë can illustrate concerns with Victorian England's similarity to "Christendom" in order to propose an antidote. As a result, the novel's suggested revisions to Christian practices—like those of Søren Kierkegaard in "The Attack on Christendom"—reinforce patriarchal practices and maintain a positively Christian outlook.

In *The Quarterly,* another early reviewer states: "It is true that Jane does right, and exerts great moral strength, but it is the strength of a mere heathen mind which is a law unto itself. No Christian grace is perceptible upon her. She has inherited in fullest measure the worst sin of our fallen nature—the sin of pride. Jane Eyre is proud and therefore ungrateful too" (452). The reviewer continues:

> The autobiography of Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor, which, as far as each individual is concerned, is a murmuring against God's appointment—there is a proud and perpetual assertion of the rights of man, for which we find no authority in God's word or in God's providence—there is that pervading tone of ungodly discontent which at once the most prominent and the most subtle evil. . . . We do not hesitate to say that the tone of mind and thought which has overthrown authority and violated every code human and divine abroad, and fostered . . . rebellion at home, is the same which has also written *Jane Eyre.* (452)

This criticism of Jane's (and Brontë's) disquietude, her passionate vocalizations against injustice, are unacceptable to Victorians because of Jane's sex, not necessarily because of her rejection of the novel's Christian avatars. It was unladylike to rise up: Victorian roles were clearly prescribed for women, and they demonized outspoken, nonpassive, nonresigned women. Charlotte Brontë was not writing for money or for fame, she was writing because she had something to say; she had empirical

evidence of the corruption of orphanages, of the grinding drudgery and exploitation inherent in the governess occupation and its requisite "feminine/Christian" traits: "patience, humility, endurance, industry" ("The Governess-Grinders" 438), and of Christianity as it was being practiced. Thus, we can see the scandal that a woman's scathing criticism of Victorian culture incited, which is why Brontë initially published the novel anonymously, proclaiming it to be an actual autobiography that an ambiguously named person, Currer Bell, merely edited. Moreover, just as Brontë's contemporary, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, sought to shake people from the robotic subscription to Christianity that led to insincere belief, so Brontë wanted to expose the disparities in Victorian society. As we will see, Jane mocks or rejects the novel's three dogmatic characters: Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers, who ironically were instances of the Victorian consensus that found *Jane Eyre*'s moral lesson confusing or infuriating. Communicating this, I argue, led her to the gothic. This narrative genre is to blame for the difficulty in determining Brontë's treatment of Christianity: Brontë shrouds her philosophy in mystery. Nevertheless, the gothic was an appropriate vehicle for Brontë to explore unspoken religious anxieties, which she conflates with femininity.

Jane Eyre's linear narrative opens on the day she is arrested and imprisoned inside the red room in which her uncle died, which she states was a dark and cloudy day and period in her life, painting herself as a Satanesque rebel, one expelled/outcast from the heavenly and comforting love of her step-aunt Mrs. Reed and her cousins. To her aunt, she is a rebellious, nonconforming, and passionate counter, like Milton's Satan. On the other hand, in her own eyes—as against her peer and cousin, John Reed, a Caligula-esque, glutton, hypocrite, and fraud, the harsh, indolent tyrant who habitually torments and persecutes Jane at the novel's outset—she is Christ-like, and Brontë's Christ-like portrayal of Jane continues throughout the novel, culminating in her rescue of Rochester, the avatar of Victorian society and perhaps England itself.

Jane Eyre is an orphan who must endure the cruelty of her cousins and adoptive aunt, who unjustly and repeatedly refers to Jane as wicked, passionate, a "precocious actress," a "compound of virulent passions, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity" (Brontë 14). Here we see how, depending on whose point of view one observes, Jane appears either Christ-like or like Milton's Satan. Different readings or interpretations of Jane Eyre are possible. Moreover, this accusation of "duplicity," of deceit, dishonesty, or fraudulence, is interesting since not only is Mrs. Reed making unfounded assaults on Jane, her *interpretation* of Jane, her *reading* of Jane, is both correct and incorrect. As a novel obeying the confines of Realism, *Jane Eyre* as inherently deceitful or fraudulent is just one version or account of the events that

surround this orphan-child. As Satan laments in Milton's *Paradise Lost,* "Me miserable! Which way shall I fly / infinite wrath, and infinite despair? / Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell" (Milton, *Paradise Lost,* book 4), so everywhere *Jane Eyre* goes she brings falsehood, for the novel is not the complete truth—despite its careful attempt to appear so. While Mrs. Reed is not speaking about narrative, only about the child that does not conform to her understanding, she is in a sense correct. Other instances of Jane Eyre being misread or interpreted as an actress or fraud include Jane's first meeting with Rochester on the way to Thornfield, where Rochester says she had "the look of another world." He says: "I marveled where you had got that sort of face. When you came on me in Hay Lane last night, I thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse: I am not sure yet. Who are your parents?" (Brontë 104). Here, Rochester's misreading, or application of his own narrative to the strange person before him, calling her a "fairy" or "witch," is another instance of characters misrecognizing Jane—in ways that are similar to early reviewers' misreadings of the novel.

The reader, however, is led to sympathize with young Jane's mistreatment and misinterpretation: the realist genre, employing one single voice to narrate a nonnegotiable tale from a limited perspective, invites a certain faith in Jane. Jerome Beaty states:

> Charlotte Brontë's narrative strategy, which leads the reader as well as young Jane to be surprised by sin and only gradually to recognize the providential nature of the world, lets many of us get too closely involved with young Jane, too uncritically accepting of her worldview, enabling—virtually determining—the reading of *Jane Eyre* as a novel of rebellion and the legitimate assertion of the sovereignty of the self. The reader is immediately captivated by the spunky hero who refuses to suffer mistreatment passively and defiantly insists upon her own rights, the rights of the individual, even the small, plain, poor, and female individual. This "loyalty" to young Jane and her values persists. (491)

Through this picture that the adult Jane, as writer, submits of the young Jane, Brontë indoctrinates Victorian readers and leads them toward the gospel of Jane Eyre: the good news of potential salvation through following the novel's prescriptions. Our biblical interpretation reclaims *Jane Eyre* from feminist readings and from the view of the novel as protofeminist due to its appearance as a female *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age story: *Jane Eyre* is secretly about Edward Fairfax Rochester, and Jane Eyre is only a vessel for transmission, for spreading the gospel, the good news, Rochester's atonement. Because there is a reliable witness, the reader is invited to believe this story of a man whose colonial, bigamous, and fraudulent practices were corrected and atoned for.

To the novel's early critics, the text seemed anti-Christian because Jane is defiant. She does not turn the other cheek or love her enemy, she does not deny her will, resign herself to her dealt position in life, and even acceptance

of Christ as a martyr for humanity's sins seems to be repudiated as well, given Jane's disapproval of the novel's two obvious martyrs: her orphan friend at Lowood school, Helen Burns, and her cousin, the missionary and love interest St. John Rivers. The rejection of the attitudes of these Christian characters is not a rejection of Christianity: rather it is a rejection of Christendom. The view that *Jane Eyre* is immoral or anti-Christian is a result of misreading the novel and the character.

At Lowood, a reform school for orphans, Jane Eyre befriends the obstinate Helen Burns, who, despite Jane's attempt at disrupting or critically engaging Helen's fixed Christianity, will not negotiate her faith. Helen says: "God waits only the separation of spirit and flesh to crown us with a full reward. Why, then, should we ever sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so certain an entrance to happiness—to glory?" (59), in response to which Jane was "silent, Helen had calmed [her], but in the tranquility she imparted there was an alloy of inexpressible sadness. [She] felt the impression of woe as she spoke, but [she] could not tell whence it came" (59). Here, Jane doesn't reject Christianity, she only finds the eight-year-old Helen's resignation—her uncritical acceptance of her lot—problematic. Later, Helen is dying of consumption as a result of Lowood's poor living conditions ("semi-starvation and neglected colds," 65), a result of Brocklehurst's mismanagement, and Jane goes to see Helen on her death bed, like a thief in the night, with the "light of the unclouded summer moon, entering here and there at passage windows, enable[ing] [her] to find [Helen's room] without difficulty" (68). Like Christ's harrowing in hell, Jane descends into Helen's sick chamber—the motif of *katabasis,* a descent into the underground, illustrated here. Jane visits Helen, says goodnight, and Helen dies in her arms. Jane does not reject Helen's point of view; rather, this indicates that Helen's philosophy is incompatible with Jane's own experience.

Jane favors a more active, responsible Christianity, much like that of Søren Kierkegaard, who while not a Victorian in the nationalistic sense of the word, published "The Attack on Christendom" in 1855 in Denmark. Kierkegaard sought to shock people out of the world of Christendom. Denmark's gadfly, he imparted the sense of necessity for a more responsible and authentic Christianity, from which Christendom—Kierkegaard's term for the state's official Christianity—had strayed. Kierkegaard reminded his readers how far from New Testament Christianity the state religion had departed. Jane can be seen as a Kierkegaardian figure. Hence the confusion concerning the novel's morals: it is not that Jane is rejecting Christianity; she rejects it as it was being practiced, including how young people were indoctrinated with the almost verbatim or robotic recital of the Christian program without any critical reflection or questioning—or, in Kierkegaard's words, how baptism and

confirmation are spectacles that take place while the celebrated is still ‘wet behind the ears,’ “so that in maturer years they might have the difficulty of breaking a ‘sacred’ obligation, imposed to be sure in boyhood, but which many perhaps may feel superstitious about breaking” (454). The novel’s genre may partly be to blame for its confused interpretations. Jane Eyre’s rejections of Helen Burns’s empathetic request for Jane’s submissive martyrdom and St. John’s marriage proposal are not rejections of Christianity, but rather of Christendom’s practice of having people take “solemn vows concerning eternal blessedness” prematurely, a practice that Kierkegaard views as perjury (Kierkegaard 454). On our view, Jane recommends a critical investigation of one’s own attitude toward religion and swearing allegiance, taking the vow, at a mature age. For Jane, the ideal approach to the truth is arrived at through a conflict between two opposing views, illustrated through Jane’s brief gloss (three sentences) of another Lowood girl. Jane provides a glimpse of this girl:

> My favorite seat was just broad enough to accommodate, comfortably, another girl and me, at that time my chosen comrade—one Mary Ann Wilson; shrewd, observant personage, whose society I took pleasure in, partly because she was witty and original, and partly because she had a manner which set me at my ease. Some years older than I, she knew more of the world, and could tell me many things I liked to hear: with her my curiosity found gratification: to my faults she also gave ample indulgence, never imposing curb or rein on anything I said. She had a turn for narrative, I for analysis; she liked to inform, I to question; so we got on swimmingly together, deriving much entertainment, if not much improvement, from our mutual intercourse. (66)

Here, Jane briefly sketches the kind of person she champions, one who is willing to engage in a dialectic—the antithesis of Helen Burns, whose dogmatic position is quite immovable. The novel’s early reviewer, who claimed that “in Helen Burns, the Christianity of *Jane Eyre* is concentrated, and with her it expires, leaving the moral world in a kind of Scandinavian gloom” (“From *The Christian Remembrancer”* 450), is incorrect.

Moreover, the same certainty and refusal to budge consumes St. John Rivers, who tries to persuade Jane to submit to his interpretation of religion without concern for her own interests: his attempt sign for an easy and passionless certificate of eternal blessedness in the hereafter that she is not prepared to receive, before she needs it. Of St. John Rivers, Jerome Beaty states, “St. John for better or worse, does seem to represent that voice of religion, virtually of God” (494). In addition, St. John Rivers is adamant in his goal, refusing to compromise on the terms of his and Jane’s union. Adrienne Rich states:

> St. John [had been] observing her for his own purposes, and finding her “docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant and courageous; very gentle and very heroic” he invites her to accompany him as his fellow missionary to India, where he intends to live and die in the service of his God. He needs a helpmate to work among Indian woman; he offers her

> marriage without love, a marriage of duty and service to a cause. The cause is of course defined by him; it is the cause of patriarchal religion; self-denying, stern, prideful and ascetic. In a sense he offers her the destiny of Milton's Eve: "He for God only, she for God in him. . . ." He will give shape to her search for meaning, her desire for service, her feminine urge toward self-abnegation: in short—as Jane becomes soon aware—he will use her. (480)

On our view, Jane must negate the negation of her will and St. John's fixed, nonnegotiable, and easy yet loveless marriage proposal. The rejection of Helen Burns, Mr. Brocklehurst, and St. John Rivers is not anti-Christian. Rather, the rejection mirrors Christendom's production and offering of legitimate meaning in a "convenient and comfortable manner" before a citizen requests it. Kierkegaard believed that Christianity should be difficult: "the eternal is acquired only in the difficult way" (442). For Jane to accept the propositions and nonnegotiable offerings of others would be counterproductive for Brontë's moral agenda, to wake people from "softened," passive, official Christianity.

Rich goes on to say: "*Jane Eyre* is a tale. The concern of the tale is not with social mores, it takes its place between realism and poetry" (469–70). Rich is, I think, incorrect here, for it seems Charlotte Brontë was invested in social mores: they are the heart of the novel, seen in the corrective possibilities, illustrated for men through Rochester. Further, this meeting point of realism and poetry results in the imperative to instruct and delight, a classical notion of literature's responsibility. Interestingly, in the "Attack on Christendom," Kierkegaard calls himself "only a poet" (437).

Brontë responds to the novelist's imperative through her employment of the gothic mode, an arena where mysteries, monsters, social anxieties, and corruption can find a productive home. Thus the gothic can serve as instructive for Victorian readers: the settings of the novel seem plausible: Lowood, Thornfield, Gateshead, etc., can be real places, yet the gothic mode enhances her treatment of these scenes and the possibilities: The novel takes place in England, but Thornfield and Whitcross are fairylands, where events can seem real and unreal, and are the battlegrounds for Jane to prove her worth and resist temptation—such as the offer to uncritically accept Rochester without interrogating his history and how he came to be—Brontë's goal for all Christians to do with regard to Christianity.

Further, the entire novel represents the eternal struggle between good and evil. And everywhere in the novel are traits of the gothic fiction tradition; consider, for example, the doubles (between Jane and Bertha), repetition (Jane repeatedly becoming a poor, lonely, beggar, walking in her "own solitary way"), the excess, anxiety, terror, the revenants (Jane repeatedly returning "from the dead"), the return of the repressed (Bertha Mason), and the importance of architecture (haunted houses and mansions, subterranean passages and corridors,

basements, attics). The importance of architecture in *Jane Eyre* is manifold, for the three most religious characters in the novel—Mr. Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers—are described in structural terms. At Lowood, Mr. Brocklehurst is described as a "black column" frowning "ominously," a piece of architecture, buttoned up…[long]…[narrow] … rigid" (52).

Lowood, where Jane is a prisoner from eight to sixteen years old, is described by Adrienne Rich: "[Lowood is] a charity school for the poor or orphaned genteel female destined to become a governess. It is a school for the poor controlled by the rich, an all-female world presided over by the hallow, Pharisaical male figure of Mr. Brocklehurst. He is the embodiment of class and sexual double standards and of the hypocrisy of the powerful, using religion, charity, and morality to keep the poor in their place and to repress and humiliate the young women over whom he is set in charge. He is absolute ruler of this little world" (Rich 472). Brocklehurst represents an application of religion that Jane rejects because it does not align with her own interpretation of the world. She rejects Brocklehurst's demands to leave her experience at the door and put on a uniform dress, attitude, and tongue. Here Jane's presentation of a flawed Christian is not an indictment of Christianity; rather, it is a criticism of Mr. Brocklehurst's presumption to absolute power and understanding, the way Brocklehurst uses his power as absolute ruler to keep the underclass, the poor and disenfranchised, in their place.

Further, his use of religious rhetoric for his own ends, and his daughter's and wife's lavish, excessive sumptuary presentation, promotes abjection in Jane. As Brocklehurst is justifying his stringent and austere regulations at Lowood by saying, "I have a master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel," his daughters walk in wearing elaborate and excessively lavish dresses, hats, and hairdos. Brocklehurst is describing how anything other than modesty, even deprivation, in dress and diet is anathema to God's rule, yet his own daughters walk in illustrating that which he is denouncing. After which, Jane says:

> I had no time to listen to what they said; other matters called off and enchained my attention. Hitherto, while gathering up the discourse of Mr. Brocklehurst and Miss Temple, I had not, at the same time, neglected precautions to secure my personal safety; which I thought would be effected, if I could only elude observation. To this end, I had sat well back on the form, and while seeming to be busy with my sum, had held my slate in such a manner as to conceal my face: I might have escaped notice, had not my treacherous slate somehow happened to slip from my hand and falling with an obtrusive crash, directly drawn every eye upon me. (55)

Here Brocklehurst depended on the young girl working diligently while he reprimanded the

teacher Miss Temple. Jane states that she could have gotten away with not working, pretending to work, hiding her face, and listening to the conversation, but the visual manifestation of Brocklehurst's corruption and hypocrisy disorients Jane and she loses focus. For Kierkegaard, to be Christian is to renounce oneself, to hate the world and oneself. Further, "honesty to Christianity demands that one call to mind the Christian requirement of poverty, which is not a capricious whim of Christianity, but is because only in poverty can it be truly served, and the more thousands a teacher of Christianity has by way of wages, the less he can serve Christianity" (Kierkegaard 440). Thus Jane is not rejecting Christianity: she rejects the wealthy Brocklehurst's incorrect assumption about "serving God." To respond to some of the novel's critics, here Jane is not being *anti-Christian*, she is being anti-Brocklehurst—against the perversion of Christ's words, which leads to the oppression and manipulation of vulnerable populations, here the young and inexperienced. To some Victorian readers, Jane was a radical Christian; to others, she was anti-Christian, but this is related to their misreading of Jane and their straying from the New Testament's teachings.

On this view, Jane is the living water, which explains her protean actions through her double, the madwoman in the attic, Bertha Mason. Through Bertha, Jane tears the wedding veil, a symbol of the pending union between Rochester and Jane that was forbidden before Rochester was given new life through Jane's love—through Jane's willing sacrifice for Rochester's sins. As opposed to other Christian characters in the novel, who attempt to persuade Jane to sacrifice herself, for all the wrong reasons—and all of which Jane rejects—only Rochester submits an offer for Jane to sacrifice herself out of love, and thus she acquiesces. Yet before Rochester can marry Jane, he must believe in Jane. He proves his faith when he calls her name, when he demands to "see . . . with sightless eyes" (Brontë 369).

As his story lies in the heart of the novel, with religious fanatics on both sides of him (Brocklehurst and St. John), Rochester's salvation is the goal of the novel. The birth of the infant Rochester, the child of Jane and Mr. Rochester, and its presentation to the world as the product of a marriage on equal terms is possible only after the destruction of Thornfield, the gothic manor where inequality, deception, and manipulation reigned. With caged woman, drunken day-laborers, haunted attics, and a plethora of tongues (Spanish, French, English), Thornfield was a Victorian Babylon that demanded destruction. Thornfield, an institution that instrumentalizes people against their will, cannot function according to Jane. If she is to dedicate her life to a person or program, she must do so actively, with blood, not because she is born into it and merely resigns herself to it, like Helen Burns, and not passively accepting St. John's rigid marriage proposal and concomitant Christian mission. Further, the destruction of

Rochester's home represents the destruction of the "lusts of his flesh," to quote a phrase that Brocklehurst employs. Rochester needed to atone for oppressing the inmates of Thornfield, for his assertion, like Brocklehurst's, of supreme authority. His separation from Thornfield illustrates Kierkegaard's claim that "to become Christian in the New Testament sense is to loosen (in the sense in which the dentist speaks of loosening the tooth from the gums), to loosen the individual out of the cohesion to which he clings with the passion of immediacy, and which clings to him with the same passion" (457).

Further, Rochester is given the second most speaking opportunities in the novel, and his long-winded confession at the center of the novel is, arguably, among the novel's most well written parts. Yet the character of Rochester gave early reviewers the most challenging interpretive problems. The *Quarterly* reviewer remarks:

> The reader may trace gross inconsistencies and improbabilities, and chief and foremost that highest moral offense a novel writer can commit, that of making an unworthy character interesting in the eyes of the reader. Mr. Rochester is a man who deliberately and secretly seeks to violate the laws both of God and man…half our lady readers are enchanted with him for a model of generosity and honor. We would have thought that such a hero had had no chance, in the purer taste of the present day; but the popularity of *Jane Eyre* is a proof how deeply the love for illegitimate romance is implanted in our nature. . . . He is made as coarse and as brutal as can in all conscience be required to keep our sympathies at a distance. ("From *Quarterly Review*" 451)

Yet this is a misreading of Rochester: these critics were unable to connect the gothic manor of Thornfield to Rochester's physical person. Of Thornfield, Jane says:

> Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery, whose cawing tenants were now on the wing: they flew over the lawn and grounds to alight in a great meadow, from which these were separated by a sunk fence, and where an array of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansion's designation. Farther off were hills: not so lofty as those round Lowood, nor so craggy, nor so like barriers of separation from the living world; but yet quiet and lonely hills enough, and seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion I had not expected to find existent so near the stirring locality of Millcote. A little hamlet whose roofs were blent with trees straggled up the side of one of the hills; the church of the district stood nearer Thornfield: its old tower-top looked over a knoll between the house and gates. (84)

This description of Thornfield suggests that the mansion is at a remove from metropolitan society. Historically, in literature, a removal into nature presents an opportunity for correction and renewal before reintegration into society. The fact that Thornfield is a liminal arena, not completely secluded yet not integrated, suggests that Thornfield, and Rochester, will be the site for a battle between competing discourses—a Victorian *Pilgrim's Progress.* Additionally, Jane notices that a "sunk fence," an illusory landscaping technique used to keep livestock restrained, explains the "etymology of the mansion's designation." If the church physically

oversees this this restrained space, then this is where Jane will encounter old and new ways of practicing faith.

Further, if Rochester's salvation comes only at the cost of relinquishing his absolute power and absolute understanding, which Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers are unwilling to do on their own accord, and if Rochester is the avatar of Victorian society and England itself, then England's abolition of slavery in 1833 could be seen as a steppingstone toward something greater. This act of abolishing slavery mirrors Rochester's release of his servants and relinquishment of power over Jane—accepting that he needs Jane, and not the other way around—an illustration of Hegel's master-servant dialectic. The destruction of Thornfield illustrates a critique of the institution of slavery, colonialism, and old ways of practicing faith.

Thornfield is the antithesis of the manor house of "moderate size and no architectural pretensions" in Ferndean, where Rochester goes for convalescence after Jane's double, Bertha, destroys Thornfield, and where Jane finds him physically deformed and in need of rehabilitation. When she sees him, Jane says, "it is time some one undertook to rehumanise you" (371). Only after Rochester atones for his original sins with blood is his salvation, his union with God, possible. The crimes that Rochester committed before Jane (his libertine lifestyle, bigamy, and the commitment of his wife to an asylum), she, under our biblical view, washes away. Here is Jane's main moral lesson. Only through the mediation of Christ-like Jane, and Rochester's own revisions of his practices, is Rochester redeemable. In the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus states:

> If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire. (Matthew 18:8)

Coincidentally, Rochester is actually maimed, made lame, and loses his sight after his wife Bertha Mason sets fire to Thornfield Hall, before she commits suicide. In a certain sense, Rochester atones for his crimes with his own flesh. If in the gothic tradition a house represents a body, then Rochester must be parted from Thornfield, and he must pay for oppressing the inmates of Thornfield. Thus, the union between Rochester and Jane, in our view, could not go forward without reeducation, a rerouting of trajectory. Jane Eyre "saves" Rochester, guides him away from an incorrect path, nurses his wounds, gives him new life, marries him, serves as an intermediary or bridge, like Jesus, for Rochester's union with the divine and paradise. Jane not only becomes Rochester's wife, she is his midwife to a reconciliation and marriage with God; she is his savior.

Through *Jane Eyre,* Brontë aimed to reconcile Victorian readers with the biblical task of authentically seeking Christ. Though some critics recognize Jane's authorship as a feminist

move, with a woman taking up the pen to tell her own tale, Rochester's story eventually takes precedence. If *gospel* means the spreading of good news, then the gospel of *Jane Eyre* is to disseminate the fall, damage, and repair of Rochester, the Victorian everyman. Like "The Attack on Christendom," *Jane Eyre* shocked readers—that was the purpose. Brontë, like Kierkegaard, aimed to rescue Victorian readers from robotic, passionless Christendom through the gospel of *Jane Eyre*, through showing readers how far they have strayed from the New Testament. Jane operates as a commissioned painter who must provide a faithful representation of the sitter. In this sense, Jane is not functioning as a subject with her own individuality and interests; rather, she is serving to glorify Rochester.

The novel betrays its own 'proto-feminism' since Jane ultimately marries Rochester and agrees to be his wife and nurse, reinforcing patriarchal domination and moralizing readers. Perhaps if Brontë's early critics had better understood Rochester—whose story lies at the heart, bookended by Jane's—they would have recognized the novel's religious sympathies: rather than seek to destroy, dismiss, or alter Christianity, Brontë seeks to strengthen or reinforce it and to reify its patriarchal foundations. On our view, Brontë paints her narrator as a Christian existentialist.

Since mass literacy is born in the nineteenth century, it is interesting how at this time, and even today, critics assigned with the task of reading and interpreting literature—like the novel's three Christians—are all capable of arriving at misinterpretations. Here we see a danger or anxiety that Brontë illustrates through the gothic: such misreading can result in subscribers being misled, and consequently even a nation being misled—perhaps even into atrocities. Jane rejects the interpretations or *readings* of uncritical "believers" and hypocritical Christians, those who do not perpetually examine the words they inherit and consume, and those who fail to authentically practice what they preach, and so must we.

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Hegel's Abuse of History: A Critique of *The Philosophy of History*

Richard Lee

Human history has been defined by a number of events: the rise and fall of empires, great wars, and times of vast expansion. These are times of struggle as well as times of success. They all have one thing in common: people were dealing with their problems and trying to find solutions to them. The philosopher Hegel saw history in a different way: he saw history as a force of Spirit attempting to manifest itself (Hegel 30). To Hegel, Spirit is a force that causes nations to rise and fall. His view is strongly eschatological in that it focuses on an end of history, which is Spirit (Berthold-Bond 15). There are multiple problems with this. First, it denies the human element in history. Though Hegel would likely have objections to this, history is made by people. People make great decisions and people make blunders. To suggest that it is some force of Spirit that intervenes in human action is to argue that people have no say in what happens in human history. Hegel also passed over certain important aspects of history in his attempt to define it as Spirit. In order to make his theory work, he puts a selective focus on the things he wants to discuss concerning history and man. There is also a problem in that he seems to have Eurocentric ideas. This is shown in how he focuses on European history and only glances at other continents for a moment. It also shows in how he writes off most ethnic groups in his introduction. For these reasons, Hegel's conception of history as Spirit is too idealistic. Hegel is missing important considerations in his argument intending to demonstrate that history—when it is looked at from a universal perspective—is Spirit.

It should be noted that this essay is a critique of the philosophical theories that Hegel proposes in his work *The Philosophy of History*; it is not meant as an indictment of all Hegel's works. Moreover, Hegel's argument deserves a fair overview. He offers both a teleological and an eschatological account of history. It is teleological in that he is arguing a history that is unfolding toward a *telos* or end (Hegel 30–31). This is a look at world history through the lens of the end and not the means. This is similar to how he has an eschatological account of history. It is eschatological in a Hegelian-Christian sense that there is an end of the world much like the Kingdom of God. It is eschatological in that it looks toward the rational state as the ideal (Hegel 72). Much like Christians, Hegel looks forward to an end-time fulfillment. In his case it is the nineteenth-century German state. Hegel argues that "it must be observed at the outset, that the phenomenon we investigate—Universal History—belongs to the realm of *Spirit*" (Hegel 30). He holds that there is a universal history that can be studied in order to know it; it must be understood in the context of Spirit. But what Spirit is this that is supposed to be understood?

To Hegel, "the perfect embodiment of spirit assumes—the State" (Hegel 31). So, the state is how the spirit of history manifests itself.

There are many states that embody spirit, not just one. Hegel talks about there being Spirit in multiple groups of people. "The spirit of a people is a *determinate* and particular Spirit, and is, as just stated, further modified by the degree of its historical development" (Hegel 68–69). Hegel is arguing that there are particular spirits of different cultures—a Spirit of China, for example, and a Spirit of the Inca—and that all these Spirits of the peoples are what drive history. According to Hegel, there is a development that happens through all these national spirits. Spirit develops from the less rational and free toward the more fully rational and free (Hegel 72). This is through a force that Hegel refers to as the "*cunning of reason*" (Hegel 47). What this really means is that, because different groups have different spirits, the more rational will thrive. He even refers to the existence of a "national genius" (Hegel 80).

What is Spirit directed toward, according to Hegel? In his words: "That this 'Idea' or 'Reason' is the *True*, the *Eternal*, the absolutely *powerful* essence; that it reveals itself in the World, and that in that World nothing else is revealed but this and its honor and glory—is the thesis which, as we have said, has been proved in Philosophy, and is here regarded as demonstrated" (Hegel 23). Here Hegel is revealing his central thesis. This argument points to Spirit revealing itself to the world. How does it reveal itself? It does so in *reason*. It is important to remember that this happens as a revealing. This is a process that happens within the confines of history, not as an outside imposition. Spirit acts within history, unfolding itself in a rational way. But it can be argued that this makes the nature of humanity too immaterial and idealistic, directed at a concept, not a materialistic end. In the view of Hegel, the end is reason. This is in opposition to more materialistic thinkers like Feuerbach and Marx who argue that existence is more physical. To Hegel, the state is a concept that is brought on by Spirit revealing reason. It is progressing through an eschatological journey that is meant to fulfill itself.

What state is Hegel referring to when he says that the Spirit is embodied by the state? (Hegel 31). "The history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning. . . . The East knew and to the present day knows only that *One* is free; the Greek and Roman world, that *some* are free; the German world knows that *All* are free" (Hegel 121). With respect to Spirit, for Hegel, history has revealed itself in the German people. Before them, Spirit was slowly manifesting itself through peoples like the Asians, Greeks, and Romans. They all had a reasoning spirit that was slowly reasoning itself and others toward the German state. It did this through the "cunning of reason" (Hegel 47).

While objections to Hegel's account will be raised here, in fairness some of his strengths

should also be recognized. He is building a history based on the notion of reason. It is reasonable to expect that, all other things being equal, the more reasonable, rational people are usually going to succeed over a lesser group. In this sense, it could be compared to two equally talented football teams, trained to play a similar game. One has a Hall of Fame coach and the other has a rookie coach. A reasonable person would expect that the better-coached team—all things remaining equal—will win most of the games between the two. In the same way, the theory that reason is going to gradually win out during the course of history does have some merit.

Hegel proposes an eschatological view of history as Spirit. It is about history leading the world to some sort of perfect end. "Hegel is led to speak of the 'absolute End of history', where spirit has fulfilled its eschatological design, its realization of freedom and the attainment of its complete design of itself" (Berthold-Bond, 15). To Hegel, history is leading the world toward a logical, rational direction that culminates in the state. The state is a perfect design in which the system allows people to realize their freedom—not just the freedom of some autocrat or a few aristocrats, but everyone. To Hegel, people are not free to do whatever they want; they are free to do what they should. The perfect state that spirit is leading toward is the German state, which supposedly puts all these ideals in order.

What is this Spirit that Hegel believed the German people to have? He argued that it was a blend of secular values with Christian values (Hegel 126–27). He saw that the history leading up through the East and the West developed social, political, and philosophical values. An important development during the Roman Empire—Christianity—was to pose a shift away from the previous directions in history: slavery becomes impossible and the infinite value of man starts to grow (Hegel, 351). A period of decline in Rome allowed an ideal state to form centuries later in Germany.

Hegel addresses Spirit as both an end of history and a means of accomplishing the end (Hegel 47, 72). He does this because spirit is supposed to unfold itself through the cunning of reason. Reason is also supposed to be the end of history, the eschatological goal. This means that reason is both the means to the end and the end itself. It is directed toward the goal of unfolding a state that is the most attuned to world spirit. With this state being one that is the most rational and the freest (Hegel 121). It is a state that knows that everyone is free. This is the end of history in that it is the end toward which history is unfolding itself. This is good because it is both rational and free.

The first problem with this, from a critical viewpoint, is that there is a denial of the human element of history. History is filled with people who are trying to face the problems of their time. Sometimes they improve their world, sometimes they complicate it. The problem is that for Hegel it is all defined by the state. Even in the case of the great historical figures that are

credited with having shaped the course of history, they seem to have the least freedom. "Such are all great historical men—whose own particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit. They may be called Heroes, inasmuch as they have derived their purposes and their vocation, not from the calm, regular course of things, sanctioned by the existing order" (Hegel 44). This is a problem for Hegel: he needs to demonstrate that actions of great leaders like Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great may have been self-motivated, yet also motivated by a greater Spirit. This draws their individual skill and motivation into question.

This issue of freedom comes down to the fact that they are receiving a call from Spirit, and this is unnatural compared to the way Spirit has been acting so far. In this situation, they are the right man at the right time. Alexander the Great went on his conquest because he was given a "vocation" by Spirit (Hegel 44). The vocation of such great figures is not a part of the "calm, regular course of things"; it is a special calling that they receive. This makes it sound as if they were somehow compelled by world Spirit or at least the Spirit of their people. That makes heroes like Napoleon, Caesar, and Alexander tools of Spirit. It can easily be interpreted that they lack agency and therefore are not free. This denies the apparent free will that humans seem to have. Who is to say that the right person is going to rise at the right time? According to Hegel, it is world Spirit. Still, what if a figure like Napoleon didn't want to conquer Europe? Does world Spirit have to stop because Napoleon changed his mind? If it can't, then he really doesn't get much of a say in the matter. On the other hand, if Napoleon does get to change his mind, perhaps his empire is never built and this world-historic figure never comes to be. This is an overly deterministic argument about history.

This does not just have to do with historic leaders like Napoleon, but also with the great blunders. An example of this is when Hegel discusses the Second Punic War. Hannibal famously attempts an attack on mainland Italy and possibly Rome to put an end to Roman influence in the Mediterranean. He had won a few important battles, and in some of them he was well outnumbered. When he sent his army to Italy, he wanted to bring war elephants into Rome (Charles and Rhodan 363). He couldn't just send a bunch of war elephants by ship, so he had to march them through Spain and Gaul, across the Alps, and into Italy. There should be an extra emphasis here—he marched elephants *across the Alps*! It is not hard to imagine why that is not a good idea.

Not surprisingly, the elephants did not survive the journey. When Hannibal's army got to the other side of the Alps, it was significantly weaker. Hegel only mentions how Rome withstood years of Hannibal's attacks until Scipio was able to attack Carthage and win (Hegel 325). Does Hegel leave room for foolhardiness? As Hegel said, Hannibal was able to survive on his own in Italy for fifteen years

with a depleted army, imagine what he could have done if he had sent a different type of army? Did historical spirit force Hannibal have a sort of momentary lapse of reason? This is unlikely; instead, Hannibal probably got too full of himself because of all of his victories against Rome, and chose to do something crazy.

The example of Hannibal shows why Hegel's ideas are too idealistic. There seems to be a human element in the movement of history. Sometimes the right people move up at the correct time, sometimes they don't. In the case of the Second Punic War, Hannibal was the wrong general for Carthage. It is fair to speculate whether another man might have defeated Rome. If such an event had happened, it would be devastating to Hegel's idea of world spirit. Rome was destined to be the next development of spirit. According to Hegel's idea of "great historic men" and "Heroes," as well as an unfolding based on reason, Rome had to have won the war because of a greater rationality in its spirit (Hegel 23, 44). Rome needed a hero. It had greater spirit, making it stronger then Carthage. Thus Scipio rose up to defeat Carthage. The problem is, it seems more likely that Hannibal's foolishness defeated Carthage rather than Rome's actually being better. Was it not so much that Rome had the right man at the right time as that Carthage had the wrong man at the wrong time?

This is a problem for Hegel because one of his stronger examples may have been an accident of history. Was Rome a more reasonable, rational group?—or was Hannibal just a bad general? If Hannibal was a just a bad general, this highlights the overly deterministic elements in Hegel. Hannibal made bad choices, and his people paid. Or, Rome was a better city-state than Carthage, and Hannibal was just going to be a lesser man then Scipio. The first possibility gives Hannibal and Scipio a choice; the second gives them no freedom. In this scenario, one way or another, Carthage needed to fail. The lack of freedom in this second option is disturbingly deterministic.

One philosophical writer who seems to have a similar objection to history's rejection of the role of man is Dostoevsky. It has been reported he was offended at the notion that there was a detachment of history from the man (Foldenyi 94). "It is entirely possible that, when Dostoevsky learned that he was cut off from history (and took offense at the notion), he determined that sheer existence has dimensions that cannot be historically denoted and leave no historical trace" (Foldenyi 94). This interesting objection is similar to the previous one about human elements in history. In this critique, Dostoevsky is arguing that there are more important aspects to the human condition than a historical trace. Perhaps the state is neither the end nor the reason. Is not the mere existence and freedom of a person a sufficient end for life? Why does an eschatological notion have to be put onto history?

Hegel proposes an idea of history without the person. "Hegel was perhaps the first

to call our attention to a fundamental philosophical problem in this amphibolic usage of the term 'history…' In rendering this truth manifest, Hegel will offer an understanding of history that will require the displacement of man with regard to both chronos and logos" (Clifford 1). Here Clifford points out that mankind is being removed from both history and its meaning. History is no longer *his story* but a force that controls the destiny of humankind. Humanity may be free to act within the state, but humanity is not the eschatological end. It becomes a means to an end. Sometimes, as in the case of those with whom Dostoevsky was imprisoned in Siberia, not even that. No wonder Dostoevsky was brought to tears (Foldenyi 94).

Along with the diminishment of the individual, there is a noteworthy racial tone that shows in Hegel. There does seem to be a Eurocentrism that pervades Hegel's work (Pradella 427). Despite the acknowledgement he does give of Asia at the beginning of history, such acknowledgments seem to drop off (Hegel 121). Hegel acknowledges there is an important geographic element to the success of a society, but that does not go far enough (Hegel 96–97). While it is true that history does seem to show that the region that a country is in affects its destiny, he spends insufficient time discussing African history and American history (Hegel 86–91). He does devote a section to Asian history, but once Europe enters, such references are swept aside.

What little Hegel does say of Africans and Americans is racially charged. In addressing Americans, he talks about a weak people, psychologically and socially, and how the continent ended up being dominated easily by Europeans (Hegel 96). While it is true that Europe did expand into the Americas relatively easy, to flippantly ascribe it to these conditions is premature. Much as Hegel diminishes the man who isn't a historic figure (Hegel 44), as already discussed, he is here diminishing large groups of people. Even the differences in the Americas are defined in terms of colonization versus conquest and Catholic versus Protestant (Hegel 101, 103). These are Eurocentric terms and he only offers a few pages to defend this argument (Hegel 100–105). The way Hegel dismisses Africans may even be worse, describing them as being in an untamed state (Hegel 111).

Hegel's does more than his dismiss individual people's autonomy; he goes further by ignoring entire continents. He is doing this by putting too much emphasis on European culture and away from the rest of the world. It is fine, perhaps even necessary, that he understand Europe well. The problem is, how can he call this a universal history? (Hegel 30). Should not a universal history be universal? If not every country has taken its proper part in it, then it is really a regional history. Hegel has not done a universal history of the world, but a history of Europe and a little of Asia. His sample size is far too small to be adequate to his claims to offer an entire philosophy of history.

For example, Hegel discusses the

Roman Spirit (Hegel 301–14). This is good; however, he is notably missing an explanation of the Carthaginian spirit and why it is competitive with Rome. Upon a survey of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*, a description of Carthaginian spirit is notably absent. This seems to be a serious flaw in Hegel's ideas concerning why Roman spirit was better—perhaps demonstrating that a grasp of Carthaginian spirit would have helped in making the argument that the Roman spirit was somehow better suited for the world.

There are other ways in which Hegel makes this mistake. In his third section on "Modern Times" he leaves out a really fascinating example that could have had interest in this discussion. It is important to note that the modern era starts with the Reformation and continues through to nineteenth-century Europe. The historic circumstance that he left out was the discovery and conquest of the New World, or the Americas. Hegel spends two pages talking about the Spanish and their Inquisition (Hegel 448–49), but these two pages neglect to address the relevance of what happened. Hegel also completely left out everything on Spain's conquest of Mexico. Instead, he only discussed what was going on in Europe with regard to the Reformation. He should have addressed the conquest of Mexico when brought up renaissance Spain.

Cortez's conquest of Mexico may have been one of the easier instances to do such an investigation. Though no historian had yet made a comprehensive history of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, there were still some valuable sources. For example, the letters of Cortez were available, as well as the works of conquistadors like Bernal Diaz. Hegel could have even looked for a native source from among the peoples who had been conquered. Yet, Hegel did not bother to discuss the spirit of the peoples that were conquered. This begs the question as to *why* this was not brought up. It is easy to assume that those groups were easy to conquer and not worth a lengthy discussion. This is not a good answer because Hegel is claiming to have a comprehensive philosophy of history. Such a history requires a comprehensive breakdown of all examples of spirit, those that have won and those that have failed—especially when there is a situation where there are a number of resources available to do such an investigation.

Admittedly, it would be unfair to expect a comprehensive breakdown of all examples of spirit that have ever been recorded in the world. The task would be truly monumental, requiring a not only Hegel's lifetime but that of a large group of researchers. The resources this would have required would be unrealistic to expect, even today. Still, this is no excuse because Hegel is claiming he knows what the end of history is, and how the major examples of spirit have brought the world to this goal (Hegel 121). The claims that Hegel made do require that a comprehensive investigation of the world be done, and this was not done.

In conclusion, Hegel attempted a big

project and fell short of it. He made bold claims about world historic figures but did not sufficiently explain how they acted in terms of World Spirit as opposed to as free human beings. The individual genius or foolhardiness is not accounted for in his drive to describe everything in terms of Spirit. This idea of a history that is fulfillment of Spirit is too idealistic and ignores the human elements that go into historical events. Instead, greatness and folly are thrust upon the great people of history in order to drive the world toward some sort of Spirit. If a person is not one such historic figure, then they are fated to fall into the forgotten and unimportant realms of history. Hegel also fails to offer a truly universal philosophy of history, which he set out to do in *The Philosophy of History*.

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