

TELOS

CONTENTS

FAITH, CONFIDENCE, AND COMMITMENT

Victor Dominguez

IN THE HOLY CHAMBERS OF DESPAIR

Ekaterina Vorozhtcova

PATTERN PERCEPTION, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE
FEMINIST AWAKENING

Vivian Louise Gray

OVERVIEW OF PROPAGANDA AND ITS POTENTIALS

Thien Le

The Journal of Philosophy at CSU Dominguez Hills

Spring 2024

Volume 5

CSUDH

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
DOMINGUEZ HILLS

FAITH, CONFIDENCE, AND COMMITMENT

Victor Dominguez

Choice is a prevalent focus throughout Soren Kierkegaard's body of work. Referred to as the father of existentialism, Kierkegaard, in his works *Either/Or* and *Fear and Trembling*, spotlights the importance, difficulty, and intensity that decisions demand upon our existence. *Either/Or*, as the title suggests, delves into the minds of two very different individuals and the choices they make. In *Fear and Trembling*, the biblical tale of Abraham is examined by a non-religious pseudonym who cannot accept religious faith but understands what is required to have it. Regardless of the respective differences between the individuals in focus, it is clear they are embodiments of the human condition where we never truly know where our commitment leads.

Imagine a child in an ice cream shop, who may desire to get a scoop of every single flavor available but is restricted to one by a good parent. They are commanded to choose one, either chocolate or vanilla, they cannot have them both and they cannot have it all. In Kierkegaard's work *Either/Or* we are shown how deciding is of the utmost importance. As mentioned earlier, the work is divided into two volumes, the first presents the perspective of an individual by the name 'A' and the second presents the perspective of an individual only referred to as B and or 'The Judge'. These are two drastically different perspectives placed side by side, as

polar as water and oil. A is described as a "witty, ironical, disillusioned young esthete" and as someone "who had seen through everything in life and found it wanting" (pg.37).¹ In other words, A is someone unimpressed and disappointed by reality. There is a bountiful amount of reasons as to why A dislikes reality, but the gist of it is that life for him is consistently boring and never satisfactory. To A, relationships are boring, decisions are boring, and yet relationships and decisions are not intrinsically boring; they become boring. A goes as far as to proclaim that "Boredom is the root of all evil" (pg.51). If 'A' were to go to an ice cream shop, he would ask for a sample of every flavor, try every single one, say they are all lacking, and then leave without actually getting a cone. Though plenty of detail is left out, for present purposes it is sufficient to reveal A is someone who trivializes life, that is to say, it is not serious and thus not worth the effort it demands. A will not decide not because he is incapable but because he sees no point in it. This is most evident in a passage where A launches into an assertion that no matter what one decides one will regret it. Famously, A proclaims "Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way" (pg.43).

¹ All citations from Hong, Howard V. And Hong Edna H. Editors. *The Essential Kierkegaard*. Princeton University Press. 2000

That is the opening line that spirals into many different scenarios where the outcome is the same, but the sentiment is clear, no matter what one decides regret is inevitable. A's position is clear: any decision is irrelevant and thus not worth it. Why contemplate a decision seriously if regret is the outcome regardless; why not laugh at those suckers who take it seriously enough to care, decide, and ultimately commit? And yet, though A refuses to make a choice, he has chosen not to choose, which is in itself a choice. Choice is inescapable and though A will never admit to having made a decision, he has decided to not decide. Nonetheless, he must have confidence in his so-called no decision if he intends to maintain it.

Water has been addressed so oil remains. B also known as 'The Judge' is the complete polar opposite to A. If B goes to an ice cream shop, he observes the flavors available and then decides on vanilla and thus commits to it. He has chosen vanilla, and though chocolate was a possible tasty choice, there is no point in lamenting what could have been. The key takeaway from the ice cream visual is that being able to decide is important, from how we choose to live to committing to an ice cream flavor. B's goal through his correspondence with A is to talk some sense into him, to get him to understand his errors and help him overcome his troubles. B is described as advocating "the integrated life of ethical reflection, normative judgment, and qualitative resolution, whereby the discontinuous life of immediacy, inclination, and desire is caught up in a life as a task-oriented to the actualization of the highest good, personal, and

social" (pg. 66). As with A, there is much to say about B, but the most important distinction between A and B is that B is willing and able to commit. B commits to marriage, to the importance not only of the initial excitement of romantic love but the relationship beyond the initial novelty. B maintains a clear antithesis to A's stances on love and relationships. For A, most evident in *The Seducer's Diary*, the process of getting one to fall in love and or be seduced is far more important than the end product, namely, commitment to a relationship. The context provided grants adequate justification to assert that of the many differences between A and B, the crucial difference is that B can recognize the importance of making a decision and A does not. At first, it appears trivial and superficial but that is not the case. B is able and willing to choose, he commits regardless of consequence; boredom does not frighten him. However, B's commitment goes only so far, and though way ahead of A, he commits to what is universally accepted. As we will see, his ability to commit is limited, and in compassion to Abraham, cannot commit to anything beyond the universally accepted.

To A, decision is pointless. To B, deciding is the right thing to do. To Abraham, how far one can truly commit is put to the test. In *Fear and Trembling* Abraham's biblical tale is analyzed to understand how someone could have such intense faith in their choices, specifically in a choice that has no real support and justification. For comparison, A and B make choices with their believed justifications.

That being said, Kierkegaard differentiates between types of commitments that an individual can make. It should be noted that the distinction he creates is between two extreme types of commitments, reminiscent of the clear differences between A and B. The first type he refers to as ‘Knight of Resignation’ can also be understood as a sort of ‘tragic hero’ meaning an individual who is willing to sacrifice everything for a necessary outcome. Consider Socrates a ‘tragic hero’, who is willing to die for philosophy, who through reason concludes that it is the only choice. On the other hand, the ‘Knight of Faith’ is someone who resigns like the tragic hero but not for a particular payoff. Rather, the ‘Knight of Faith’ renounces everything, including reason, for faith in a non-guaranteed payoff. To most, the ‘Knight of Faith’ would come across as an irrational individual. Kierkegaard explains, “When a person walks what is in one sense the hard road of the tragic hero, there are many who can give him advice, but he who walks the narrow road of faith has no one to advise him—no one understands him” (pg.101). That is to say, the ‘Knight of Faith’ is utterly alone, unable to explain what he commits to such a choice because others cannot understand. It is personal and thus incapable of being understood and supported by others. For Abraham, reason does not provide support for his decision, rather faith is the fundamental support to his decision and commitment.

Abraham, blessed by God, is gifted a child. Not long after, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his child to prove his love and loyalty. Surprisingly, though under intense agony, Abraham agrees and goes as far as to draw the knife for the killing blow. At the last minute, God rescinds his decision, and a ram is sacrificed instead. Abraham was willing to murder his child in the name of God for no other reason than God commanded it. “Why, then, does Abraham do it?” one may reasonably ask. The answer: “For God’s sake and—the two are wholly identical—for his own sake. He does it for God’s sake because God demands this proof of his faith; he does it for his own sake so that he can prove it” (pg.100). Based on characterization provided, it would hold that A would enjoy the idea of such a request but never act upon it, because that would mean commitment. B would not kill because it is against the rules made by man and the rules commanded by God himself. Abraham does not ignore God, nor do the rules or consequences deter him, though he feels himself torn. Whether he internally struggles or whether others see him as a murderer or a faithful servant, God has commanded it and it shall be done. Faith, it seems, produces the most resolute decision-making capability and yet provides no justification and no explanation for itself.

It is clear that all three individuals have confidence in their respective choices, and yet A and B do not compare to Abraham. Regardless of the

differences that all three individuals maintain, they are mirror reflections, avatars if you will, of the reality of the human condition. If we strip away the grandeur of the biblical tale, Abraham is an avatar for the human condition where we never know anything for certain and can only hope we are doing the right thing. Is Abraham a murderer or the standard for devout followers of God? The response: It's irrelevant, he is a representative of the human condition. Every action is subject to the audience and is therefore subject to inquiry. The decision to get married, the decision to stay a bachelor/bachelorette, to do something God commanded you to is always called into question. Whatever we call Abraham's is for others' benefit. One looks at their own decisions and compares them to those before them to gauge whether they are in the wrong or the right. Kierkegaard's perspective is that only Abraham is the most admirable and true to his decision, one who displays genuine real faith.

Alas, not every individual can reach the level of commitment Abraham has, nor reach the level of faith Kierkegaard labels the highest form of commitment. Take A, for example, the idealist who is never satisfied with reality. To lead a life in that way, to wholeheartedly believe that commitment is the one-way road to boredom (the root of all evil) A must commit to his choice not choose. And though A appears as sure as one can be, that type of mindset can only be sustained for so long. Though Abraham

and B may be of similar cloth, they are not the same. B follows conventions because they are all agreed upon by others. Collectively they have agreed on specific rules and commit to following them. Abraham follows collectively agreed rules as well, but his true commitment is to God and thus will always make an exception whenever God asks anything of him, regardless of whether they are in accord or discord with the agreed upon rules.

Everyone is A, B, and Abraham. Their respective thoughts and justifications are ones we have all had. Why marry and start a family? Because that is what one does. Why refuse to marry? Because one does not wish to be bored like everyone else. Why do something if it is not explained nor justified? Perhaps because God has commanded it, and that command is not a reason but a duty. How could we ever decidedly categorize an individual's choice if they are not known to us? A describes a spider to whom we are no different concerning commitment. A describes "When a spider flings itself from a fixed point down into consequences, it continually sees before it an empty space in which it can find no foothold, however much it stretches" (pg.39). Like the spider, A, B, and Abraham, one cannot and will not ever know what a decision entails. Thus, in alignment with Kierkegaard's view, I uphold that a firm commitment and firm faith are the only guiding lights on a dim path.

IN THE HOLY CHAMBERS OF DESPAIR

Ekaterina Vorozhtcova

“If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could not be in anxiety. Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man.”¹ For Kierkegaard, an astute and profound Christian, the exploration of despair is a seminal aspect of his theological existentialism. Kierkegaard claims that the experience of despair is not merely psychological discomfort but a crucial aspect of human existence, essential for the comprehension and development of our true identity in relation to God. This essay explores how despair can be paradoxically uplifting by exposing the tension between human finitude and divine infinitude. It demonstrates that despair can draw us closer to faith rather than lead us away from it. As humans are afflicted with uncertainty and confusion, moving towards faith can be beneficial to an individual's growth and understanding.

It is difficult to discuss the notion of despair without also discussing the notion of hope.

The term despair translated into the Russian language would be *otchayanie* (*ot-* separation/ termination; *chayanie-* hope), where its etymological meaning reveals it as something

repellent to aspiration, discontinuation of hope. In other words, despair is fundamentally antithetical to hope; and the very condition of hope is essential to a person's spiritual attitude. Humans always hope, strive, wish, and create algorithms of greater possibilities for themselves—be it in the present or the future. The first rupture in existence occurs when the desire for a better condition is problematized by actuality. Kierkegaard views time as sequential and believes that the past, present, and future do not exist. Moreover, there is no way to define the present. Only a never-ending sequence exists:

“However, precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future.”² In this case, time is the territory where the eternal can intersect with the temporal; hope then might be seen as an existential bridge, connecting the individual's current state of being with a glimpse of what could be despite the uncertainty and unpredictability of existence.

According to Kierkegaard, particularly in *The Sickness Unto Death*, man's inner structure is

¹ Kierkegaard, Søren, et al. *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of*

Hereditary Sin. Princeton University Press, 1980, p.155.

² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.85

comprised of various paired components, such as possibility and necessity, ideality and actuality, finitude and infinitude. Despair represents the internal discord inside the spiritual synthesis that is man. Kierkegaard asserts that the spirit makes the synthesis of the soul and body possible. Spirit, then, is the self's possibility or the possibility of freedom, and it manifests itself in the fearful representation of the being. Since the synthesis is the dialectical interaction between freedom and necessity, it suggests that the self is an ongoing negotiation between these two forces. To further elaborate, the introduction of spirit as the third element should not be mischaracterized as freedom itself, but rather understood as the permissive condition that enables the possibility of the synthesis between freedom and necessity. Therefore, the spirit acts as the medium through which the self can actualize its freedom within the boundaries of necessity: "But freedom's possibility is not the ability to choose good or evil. The possibility is to be *able*."³ Kierkegaard goes on to characterize despair as spiritlessness: "The speaker maintains that the great thing about him is that he has never been in anxiety, I will gladly provide him with my explanation: that it is because he is very spiritless,"⁴ which claims the universality of anxiety and despair. He also states, "Man qualified

as spiritless has become a talking machine."⁵ As Kierkegaard vividly illustrates, the absence of spirit relegates an individual to the mechanical repetition of words and actions, devoid of engagement with the deeper existential realities. Spirit, therefore, is not an abstract concept but a fundamental aspect of human existence that fills life with meaning and depth. Spirit is what confronts the despair of a meaningless life and strives towards self-actualization and authenticity, recognizing and resolving the contradictions between finitude and infinitude, possibility and necessity.

Psychologists try to explain sin as its consequences, and dogmatics try to define what sin is: "While psychology thoroughly explores the real possibility of sin, dogmatics explains hereditary sin, that is, the ideal possibility of sin."⁶ Kierkegaard here claims that "sin entered the world in anxiety."⁷ Temporality becomes sinful once sin is assumed. The psychological stage that comes before sin is anxiety. Kierkegaard distinguishes between conventional fear, or dread brought on by an external source, and unexplained fear, or fear brought on by yearning, longing, or terror. As for the latter, Kierkegaard saw it as a manifestation of the human experience of "nothingness," which is made visible in the movement from innocence as a natural state to the recognition of the

³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.60.

⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.157.

⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.95.

⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.23.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.53.

possibility of sin, and as the potential for freedom and spirit. An individual experiences dread that is both a fascination and repulsion to the object of fear and emptiness, which is realized as a desire to violate the prohibition. He says: “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness.”⁸ Freedom itself can be made possible in the moment of choice, which is inherently linked to the potential for sin. Without the possibility of choice, or in other words, possibility to sin, freedom would be meaningless. Anxiety, then, is related to the future only insofar as the future is feasible. Therefore, anxiety is a harbinger of sin since it arises from the discovery of infinite possibilities, including the potential to sin.

While a person experiencing depression struggles with mental and emotional pain, a person in despair has given up all hope and is unable to recognize the critical lessons that may be learned from their depressive episodes. Kierkegaard develops conditions of despair in which a person experiencing despair can be both conscious and unconscious of being in despair. There are three types of a despaired individual: 1) one who has no

understanding of who they are;⁹ 2) one who is aware of who they are but does not wish to be themselves,¹⁰ and 3) one who is aware of who they are but wants to be himself in defiance.¹¹ The case of unconscious despair and false hopelessness is the first one. A person who has not laid his foot on the path of their personal development is innately happy when experiencing sensuous pleasures. The natural man has a primitive and falsely serene life and even denies being in despair. However, for Kierkegaard, there can be no question about the entirety and universality of despair: “It makes no difference whether the person in despair is ignorant that his condition is despair - he is in despair just the same.”¹² Despair is an existential inevitability that acutely demonstrates the tension between who we are and who we aspire to be. Despair is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition, existing even if one is not consciously aware of it; it represents an inherent dissonance that permeates our existence.

When someone realizes they are a separate being, the existential equilibrium between infinite and finite is disrupted, leading to an intensification of despair. There are two expressions of this sort of despair: despair-weakness and despair in defiance. When someone feels fragile

⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept Of Anxiety* p.61.

⁹ Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Sickness unto Death*. Transl. Walter Lowrie. Princeton University Press, 1941, p.44.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*

p.58.

¹¹ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.69.

¹² Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.44.

or weak, they want to be someone else because they either have no sense of self: “When immediacy despairs, it does not even have enough self to wish or dream that it had become that which it has not become,”¹³ or are afraid of their self, so they strive to change and to deny themselves: “In despair, it cannot forget this weakness; it hates itself in a way, will not in faith humble itself under its weakness in order to thereby recover itself.”¹⁴ A person who firmly wants to be himself and does not require the “assistance of eternity” is at the other extreme, known as despair in defiance to be oneself: “There is the humiliation of being obliged to accept any kind of help unconditionally, of becoming a nothing in the hand of the ‘Helper’ for whom all things are possible.”¹⁵ This refusal to humble oneself under one's limitations would be an example of demonic “*pride*.”¹⁶

Kierkegaard's understanding of psychology is very modern. The tasks that he sets for psychology are the tasks that psychology faces today. It is, first of all, the task of understanding and describing the mental life of the human being. He says: “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.”¹⁷ The despair that Kierkegaard examines in this work defines the self; a psychologist is powerless to resolve it. In such a way,

there is no therapy for it—the psyche itself is a problem. Kierkegaard posits: “The concept of anxiety is almost never treated in psychology. Therefore, anxiety is something different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is the reality of freedom as possibility before necessity.”¹⁸ Psychology cannot cure despair; it will not do much unless it provides medication to numb the individual and eliminate some of the human worries. The issue stems from the spirit as the synthesis of psyche and the physical. For Kierkegaard, despair can be set right through faith and relation with Christ: “The only thing that is truly able to disarm the sophistry of sin is faith.”¹⁹ The way out of despair is through a deep, personal engagement with faith and a connection with Christ. Such faith is not merely belief in doctrine but an active, lived experience. This is not to argue that psychology is completely impotent; psychology's function is to help an individual get to a place where one can face and work through his despair within an existential framework rather than to cure despair.

It can be argued that in difficult periods of life, a person's faith is tested for strength, and a person who retains faith in God - retains himself as a person, his mental stature, preserve the

¹³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.53.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.62.

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.71.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*

p.144.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* p.155.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* p.49.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* p.117.

image of his future and the very possibility to have that future for himself. However, faith is not something static; there is always a certain amount of objective uncertainty - space for spiritual work; otherwise, from a clearly realized faith, it can become blind, fanatical, and degenerate into something destructive. Faith is not tranquility or psychological comfort. As Kierkegaard claims: "Faith does not thereby annihilate anxiety, but itself eternally young, extricates itself from anxiety's moment of death. Only faith can do this, for only in faith is the synthesis eternal and at every moment possible."²⁰ It does not mean a calm and secure life nor guarantee satisfaction, power, or self-realization, but it points to the meaningfulness of human existence. Kierkegaard asserts that it is through faith that one finds the strength to reconcile the eternal with the temporal, the ideal with the actual, allowing one to engage in a meaningful way with anxieties and despair despite contradictions and challenges.²¹ Work with faith emerges as both a profound personal commitment and a gift. It is work with the deepest, most intimate level that integrates the personality, the basis of worldview, and deep attitudes that create the future and determine the present. Restoring and strengthening faith as a spiritual existential resource allows us to reveal most fully the powerful and creative sources of the human spirit and ways of creative transformation of oneself and current

situations.

In closing, Kierkegaard's exhaustive analysis of despair, anxiety, and the essence of human existence is a provocative way, in our modern world, to view the inherent contradictions of our being. His perspective, considering despair not simply as a psychological condition but as an ontological problem and pivotal aspect of spiritual maturation, is not an easy pill to swallow for us who strive to live an easy life of comfort. This approach calls us to have a deep look inside ourselves and into a more profound relationship with our identity, the divine, and our surroundings. The synthesis between the finite and the infinite is a turning point for personal and spiritual evolution. Through Kierkegaard's lens, despair is reimagined from an unbearable hindrance to a valuable opportunity, pushing toward a more genuine way of living and a more intimate connection with the divine. His insights show that navigating through despair via faith is a significant avenue that can help cultivate resilience rooted in deep spiritual wisdom and understanding. Life is full of complexities; when facing these complexities rather than denying them, individuals are more likely to encounter transformative insights. By accepting the ambiguities of our spiritual journey, we uncover the means to transcend despair and the prospect of uncovering a deeper purpose and meaning in our lives.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, p.117

²¹ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* p.14

PATTERN PERCEPTION, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE FEMINIST AWAKENING

Vivian Louise Gray

Philosophy has been a male-dominated sphere since its creation. Some ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, even believed women to be deficient in their ability to engage in rational thought. Our society has maintained this patriarchal view over time although it has seemingly plateaued in recent years. With the resurgence of the “traditional wife” or as it is commonly known “tradwife” movement in the United States more women are returning to this model where they are expected to stay home with children, cook, clean, and manage the household overall. They are told to honor their husbands and not question them. They are expected to remain silent and if they do not, they will be silenced. Through this paper, I will explore the similarities and differences between pattern perception and intersectionality. Both methods seek to help all women overcome patriarchal oppression by expressing their agency through finding the gap in which they are not seen or heard, to express and legitimate outlandish emotions, raising consciousness, and using speech in a way that allows for pushback against oppression and calls for social justice. The difference between these two methods is that pattern perception still seems too general and does not propose a lasting

solution, it simply highlights the issues all women face.

Therefore, intersectionality is needed and together they work to ensure the flourishing of all women’s agency. In this essay, I will be referencing Marilyn Frye’s “The Possibility of Feminist Theory,” bell hooks’ “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” Jennifer Nash’s “A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars,” and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”.

Pattern perception is a philosophical method that observes the disparity between the lives of women and the rules of patriarchy. The goal of pattern perception is to move away from the standard of generalization that is currently used. According to the essay “The Possibility of Feminist Theory” by Marilyn Frye, metaphysical generalization is “declaring this or that to be the what-it-is of a thing”; it “threatens the annihilation of that which does not fit its prescription” (Frye 38). But when we use this method, it violates the particulars because it effaces them. In order to begin the process of pattern perception, you must first “sketch a schema” (Frye

39). This lays the groundwork for identifying patterns and helps women to make sense of their feelings when “in the company of men,” whether that be “stifled, frustrated, angry,” and so on. Next, when articulating patterns, you need “encounters with difference, with variety,” thus providing room for loose generality (Frye 40). Then, it “requires novel acts of attention” (Frye 40). You must practice “consciousness-raising techniques” that break “the accustomed structures of conversation” (Frye 40). By using this strategy, women will be given the opportunity to have an “equal voice and equal audience” (Frye 40). An example of this is a woman noticing how frustrated she feels when in a meeting with male colleagues. Homing in on this frustration, she can identify patterns that cause this feeling to arise, like being spoken over. When she has made this realization, she can articulate the issue in order.

To stop it from happening in the future. I believe these tools can effectively undermine white supremacy as well because you can use them to point out patterns within that as well.

White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to people of color, and because of this they also believed that it was their right to conquer and enslave non-white nations. According to bell hooks in the essay “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” white supremacy is present in the language we use. We speak to the “oppressed and oppressor

in the same voice” (hooks 49). “The oppressed struggle in language to recover [themselves], to reconcile, to reunite, to renew” (hooks 49). An example of this deep-seated notion would be a Black person being told they speak like a White person. Unfortunately, this is something I have been told all my life. What was most shocking is that this derogatory statement was being perpetuated by my own community.

The reason I was told that I “speak like a White person” is because I use proper English when speaking. With pattern perception, I am able to see how this statement is linked to White supremacy. What that statement shows me is that certain people in society expect less of me because of my race (and gender). The reason they expect less of Black people and women is because, at one point, we were not even seen as human beings. We were seen as property to be traded and sold to increase the wealth of others. And when we fought for our freedom and eventually received it, we were still treated as second-class citizens. We do not receive the same education as White children, and we do not have the same opportunities. We are limited by our race in society. The notion that I “speak like a White person” reflects this. The expectation is that I would not be able to communicate using proper English due to my race and gender.

Intersectionality is the overlap between two or more categories whether that be gender, race, class,

sexual orientation, and more. The goal of intersectionality as a philosophical methodology is to shed light on marginalized groups that are not seen; an example of this would be Black women. According to the essay “A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars” by Jennifer Nash, intersectionality is “focused on transformative and counter-hegemonic knowledge production and radical politics of social justice” (Nash 38). In the essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Kimberlé Crenshaw examines the intersection of different forms of oppression experienced by Black women. By using intersectionality, Crenshaw takes a closer look at the struggles Black women face in terms of their race and gender. If we were to look at the world outside of an intersectional lens, many experiences would not be “captured wholly” (Crenshaw 1244). The use of intersectionality is what shapes “structural, political and representational aspects” of certain lived experiences (Crenshaw 1244). Using this method, we can account for more people’s identities and struggles instead of cherry-picking what aspects we would like to focus on, which could cause us to completely miss those who need our attention most, whom for Crenshaw would be Black women. An example of this is that “counselors who provide rape crisis services to women of color report that a significant proportion of the resources allocated to them must be spent handling problems

other than rape itself” (Crenshaw 1250). The standards these services adhere to are based on the needs of “largely white and middle-class” survivors (Crenshaw 1250). Choosing to ignore the difference between the two does women of color a disservice as it hinders “the ability of counselors to address the needs of nonwhite and poor women” (Crenshaw 1250). So, it is clear that “women of color occupy positions both physically and culturally marginalized within the dominant society, and so information must be targeted directly to them in order to reach them” (Crenshaw 1250).

I believe pattern perception and intersectionality relate to each other because they both have the same goal. Pattern perception and intersectionality are both able to find the gaps because they move away from the standard method of generalization. They both allow for the expression of outlaw emotions. Pattern perception helps call for women to characterize these emotions on their own without the intervention of someone else. Thus, they encourage women to act autonomously. They get to decide if they are “imagining it or overreacting” (Frye 40). They are able to “declare [themselves] crazy or bad” (Frye 40). It gives them a voice and power to decide. For example, pattern perception can be used to help a woman to interpret how she feels about receiving unwanted sexual advances in the workplace. Intersectionality shines a light on marginalized groups that do not receive as much attention as others

by making spaces more inclusive for them. With this being so these groups can express and make sense of the emotions they have suppressed or felt unsure of.

All women can raise consciousness by using both pattern perception and intersectionality to share information with others. Raising consciousness through pattern perception creates “a movement away from the isolation of the individual” (Frye 38). It allows us to “[perceive] similarities in our experiences” (Frye 38). Through this, women can “engage in communication” that allows them to speak “unspoken facts and feelings, unburying the data of our lives” (Frye 38). Women can share their experiences with one another, which “collectively [generates] a new web of meaning” (Frye 38). An example of this would be women attending a domestic violence survivors’ group. The women who attend would be able to share their experiences and warn others about what to look out for whilst finding community and support from one another. Crenshaw shows that intersectionality can be used to raise consciousness through her analysis of 2 Live Crew.

2 Live Crew was a provocative rap group that produced music that was “misogynistic” and sexist (Crenshaw 1284). In 1990, members of the group were “arrested and charged under a Florida obscenity statute for their performance in an adults-only club in Hollywood, Florida” (Crenshaw 1283).

Ultimately, they were acquitted of these charges; however, a “federal court judge ruled that the sexually explicit lyrics in 2 Live Crew’s album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, were obscene” (Crenshaw 1283). This ruling sparked many controversial conversations regarding rap music and its “representation of sex and violence” (Crenshaw 1283). Crenshaw highlighted two of these conversations concerning the 2 Live Crew controversy. George Will, a political columnist, believed that the music was “misogynistic filth.” Will stated that 2 Live Crew objectified Black women by fostering a “combination of extreme infantilism and menace” (1284). What is missing from Will’s critique is an understanding of the cultural significance of rap music. Henry Gates, a Harvard professor of Philosophy, saw the music as “a means to a cheap laugh,” arguing that it showcases “African-American cultural tradition of the ‘dozens’ and other forms of verbal boasting, raunchy jokes, and insinuations of sexual prowess” (Crenshaw 1292). Crenshaw states that “where Will saw a misogynistic assault on Black women by social degenerates, Gates found a form of ‘sexual carnivalesque’ with the promise to free [Black people] from the pathologies of racism” (Crenshaw 1284). In her critique, Crenshaw raises to consciousness what both Will and Gates missed, which is the effect 2 Live Crew’s music had on Black women. Black women are forced to “accept misogyny and its attendant disrespect and exploitation in the service of some

broader group objective, whether it be pursuing an antiracist political agenda or maintaining the cultural integrity of the Black community” (Crenshaw 1294). Crenshaw’s analysis shows who the true victims are in this debate: Black women. They are made to be the butt of the joke and are expected to go along with it.

Using both tools, we can use speech in a way that pushes back against oppression and calls for social justice. With pattern perception you can use speech to call out patterns of oppression. For example, “men [interrupting] women more than women interrupt men in conversation” (Frye 39). So, after a woman has identified this pattern, she can articulate it as “dominating” (Frye 39). Her verbal recognition of this behavior is a form of pushback because she is calling out this inappropriate behavior. Going back to my personal example, I could use pattern perception to call for social justice by pointing out the fact that the lack of proper funding for schools in lower-income communities is a vestige of white supremacy. Another example of using speech to call out oppression is addressing the fact that “women of color can be erased by the strategic silences of antiracism and feminism” (Crenshaw 1253). Crenshaw argues for intersectionality as a means of giving Black women a voice against oppression. When Crenshaw went to “review Los Angeles Police Department statistics reflecting the rate of domestic violence interventions by precinct because such statistics can

provide a rough picture of arrests by racial group, given the degree of racial segregation in Los Angeles,” the L.A.P.D., “would not release the statistics” (Crenshaw 1252). The LAPD not sharing these statistics was done so purposely to protect Black men. They did not want them to be portrayed “as unusually violent, potentially reinforcing stereotypes that might be used in attempts to justify oppressive police tactics and other discriminatory practices” (Crenshaw 1253). But that decision did not take into account what Black women had endured and how not releasing this information would affect them. Crenshaw, advocating for the release of the statistics on domestic violence, calls for social justice because it exposes the abuse that is being suffered by Black women and forces the Black community to look inward and put a stop to the violence.

The difference between pattern perception and intersectionality is that pattern perception is still too general. You do not get enough of a focus on minority groups because you are still trying to sum up women’s experiences into a neat box. The goal is to break free from “the concept *woman*” (Frye 36). It is important to recognize that all women are different. They come from different “cultures, locales, and generations” (Frye 36). “All female humans may live lives shaped by concepts of [a] Woman; they are not all shaped by the same concept of [a] Woman” (Frye 36). But with intersectionality, the focus is not just on being a woman. The focus is on the

relationship between other factors, such as race, and how they influence others' perceptions of us and how we exist in this world. Intersectionality creates a long-lasting space for others to not only take the time to listen to voices that have been suppressed but also begin to understand and support their needs. Pattern perception seems to be a steppingstone to awakening the mind to the patriarchy and white supremacy that exists. Once you have perceived and pointed out a pattern that is it for this method. You will have to look elsewhere for a solution on how to correct the perceived issue. Intersectionality would be the necessary solution to the issues pointed out with pattern perception. Intersectionality can be used to modify laws that have oppressed otherwise unseen groups (minorities).

Some may argue that neither of these methods is enough to combat patriarchy and white supremacy because they focus on certain minority groups, i.e., Black women. Fortunately, this is not true. Pattern perception can be expanded beyond the feminist context to be used by men to examine the patriarchy's effects on them. For example, a man can use pattern perception as a way to point out the patriarchal hold that has been placed over men in terms of their emotions. Most men feel like they cannot share their emotions whether it be frustration, sadness, or fear, due to the possibility of being perceived as "weak." The oppressive generalization men face, which keeps them alienated from their

emotions, is that to be a man, you must be stoic. Our society believes that the "ideal man" is one who does not show too much affection or emotion. Using pattern perception, men can articulate the error in this view and express the importance and strength in showing emotions. They would also be able to deconstruct the notion that there is only one way to be a man. Intersectionality can be used to show the intersections of class and gender, disability and class, and sexual orientation and race to benefit men.

In conclusion, I have explored the similarities between pattern perception and intersectionality, such as allowing us to find the gaps, to express and legitimate outlaw emotions, raise consciousness, and utilize speech in a way that pushes against oppression and calls for social justice. I have also explored the differences between these methods such as intersectionality moving away from using reducing generality and pattern perception being one step in the process of awakening to patriarchal and white supremacist ideals. Overall, both of these methods can be used to meet the same goal which is shining the light on the communities that are never seen and that are pushed aside. One implication of shining the light is that some may not be ready to step into it. It may take time for people to feel like they are ready to share their experiences. Everyone may not be ready to open their minds to how our society is dominated by patriarchy and white supremacy. However, I believe it is still

important to share this information so they can raise their consciousness and decide for themselves whether this is what they stand for.

Work Cited

Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*, Columbia Law, <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/critique1313/files/2020/02/1229039.pdf>.

Frye, Marilyn, et al. “The Possibility of Feminist Theory.” *Women, Knowledge, and Reality Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, Taylor and Francis, Florence, 2015, pp. 34–47.

Hooks, bell, et al. “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” *Women, Knowledge, and Reality Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, Taylor and Francis, Florence, 2015, pp. 48–55.

Nash, Jennifer. “A Love Letter from a Critic, or Notes on the Intersectionality Wars.” *ProQuest Ebook Central*, ProQuest, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/csudh/detail.action?docID=5609560>.

OVERVIEW OF PROPAGANDA AND ITS POTENTIALS

Thien Le

Propaganda in recent history has been assigned a negative connotation in its association with brainwashing, fascists like Nazi Germany, or dictators like Stalin. It is then understandable for us to want to avoid them. “Do your research and think for yourself” is a common advice when one becomes indoctrinated. But is propaganda as bad as it seems to be? This paper aims to conduct a conceptual analysis of propaganda, demonstrating its potential as an effective rhetorical tool for shaping societal values, preserving stability, and advancing collective progress within broader contexts, thereby challenging the conventional notion of propaganda as inherently negative.

First, propaganda had no negative connotation when it was first introduced. Its official usage was first recorded in the 17th century by Pope Gregory XV in his creation of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) to combat disinformation and inflammatory charges by the Protestants while also spreading the faith to others (Natal 29). Only in World War I did the term start to accumulate bad implications because it was the front description for many disinformation campaigns conducted by both sides. Later, the term's association with the fascists like Nazi Germany, who caused many atrocities

such as the Holocaust, cemented those bad implications. This is a brief history of the word propaganda and how it got its bad reputation.

Propaganda is a form of rhetorical technique. Harold Lasswell, a communication theorist, describes propaganda as “the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols” (Forestal 309). Propaganda is a technique that is used to influence the masses through tailored messages that can affect people's perception of the world around them, with the end goal being to change their behaviors. The significant symbols, for Lasswell, are our subtle gestures in reacting to an event (clenched fists, sharp voice). Effective propaganda will slowly lower people's guard toward whatever ideas that the propagandists want them to have. The outcome of successfully altering those subtle gestures will affect the underlying reasons for how and why people act. A simple example is the concept of the American Dream, in which the US is a land of opportunities and if the individual work hard enough they can achieve it (the outcome is usually depicted as a happy married couple with a house surrounded by a white picket fence and two children: one boy and one girl).

Propaganda is an expression of power in communication. Regardless of its intention, propaganda is used to guarantee the smooth sailing of what it is trying to convince us to follow. This ties into Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony. The notion of hegemony involves the idea of consent, which is usually balanced with force (Martin 3.1). The state does have power over individuals in the form of laws or military force to uphold order, but it isn't the only role that the state has. Another role that the state also plays is that of an educator through promoting the right way to live for its citizens to build consent. Propaganda's expression of power is seen through how the State maintains its legitimacy through consent from the public.

Lastly, propaganda operates within the interactive dynamics of encoding and decoding messages. All governments and states adhere to their distinct ideologies, serving as the foundational rationale behind their actions and policies. Propaganda plays on an individual's natural tendency to live spontaneously in an ideological way, whether we realize it or not (Aaron 3485). Propaganda capitalizes on our deeply ingrained beliefs and biases, making it challenging to discern them without introspection. It utilizes this gap in self-knowledge to introduce the propagandist's ideology to the public in a way that will create an inclination to agree and follow that ideology. Both CDC's recommendations for taking Covid vaccines and the anti-vax movement

tap into people's natural fear of illness. The CDC showcase how taking the vaccine can prevent and mitigate Covid while the anti-vax people focusing on the side effect of how taking them.

For propaganda to work, it needs a specific skill set. Successful propaganda does not rest on how well you tailored the message to an audience but rather on your ability to "identify and exploit a favorable set of social circumstances" (Forestal 309). Propaganda has less to do with leading people to believe in new ideas or values but more with conditioning people to act a certain way through some widely accepted ideas that are often very abstract. This is where the propagandists will try to embed into their messages these ideas that people want to have such as happiness, safety, or fairness.

In addition, censorship is needed to maintain propaganda. Walter Lippmann claims, "Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable" (Natal 30). People choose to believe in a propaganda message when they see it as something desirable that they want to have. Therefore, propaganda requires censorship to promote the desirable and obscure the undesirable part of whatever that message intends to persuade us.

Due to the inherent manipulative nature of propaganda, as shown in its requirement for censorship to be

operable, propaganda has been excessively exploited by authoritative and dictatorial states throughout history. It can easily be seen in how Jason Stanley describes the uses of political propaganda as to “conceal politicians’ or political movements’ clearly problematic goals by masking them with ideas that are widely accepted” (Stanley 24). Stanley’s description gives us another insight into how propaganda works when exploited by hostile propagandists. The way fascist politics work is that it masks its intent by invoking ideas that the public favors, like freedom and fighting corruption. It may sound fine at first in appearance, but the actions that allegedly stemmed from those popular ideas will always have problematic and often hypocritical consequences. Pot calling the kettle black is a good description for fascist politicians who use the idea of fighting corruption to mask their political actions because their goal is to kick the corrupted ones out so they can come in and do the same thing. A historical example of this hypocritical use of propaganda can be found in the failed Confederacy’s causes for the Civil War. Stanley writes, “the rhetoric of liberty worked during the Confederacy by explicitly tying white southerners’ liberties to the practice of slavery” (Stanley 30). State’s rights, or the freedom for the State to do whatever they want, is contingent on the practice of slavery or the oppression of enslaved black people. The Confederacy frames the practice of slavery under economic initiatives while obscuring its

problematic ethical implications. The rhetoric equates money with freedom, suggesting that the abolishment of slavery will lead to an absence of free/dirt cheap labor and that turns into a huge loss of money which equals the loss of freedom. That rhetoric was a very effective approach because even when the abolishment of slavery would only affect a certain demographic: rich slave/plantation owners (most, if not all, white), it caused the Civil War that affected the whole country. Stanley coined this kind of propaganda, using an ideal to pursue a goal, ultimately working against the ideal it seeks to uphold, as undermining propaganda.

On the other hand, Stanley differentiates undermining propaganda with a different persuasive technique that he deems civil rhetoric. Stanley describes that the goal of civil rhetoric is to “undermine flawed ideologies that diminish empathy” (Stanley 471). What undermining propaganda does is pitch two groups against each other (my freedom rests on you being oppressed), which erodes empathy because it encourages one group to see the other one as aggressors (most of the time, it is the other way around). Civil rhetoric is an attempt to rejuvenate that empathy among groups. Stanley gave an example of Du Bois’s idea of using art as propaganda. He referenced an example of Du Bois’s strategy in a 1921 Broadway play, *Shuffle Along*, that Black people created, produced, and acted. Its name suggests a cooperative tone that lowers white people’s barriers and uses “novel forms

of jazz to call attention to the vastly greater complexity and humanity of Black American life” (Stanley 471). Reduce internal resistance through tailored messages, the attempt to gain consent, and the introduction of an ideology through encoding and decoding (seeing the play and reflecting on the information given) are all present in this civil rhetoric that Stanley mentions, so it is safe to say that civil rhetoric is also an instance of propaganda.

In supporting that propaganda is not necessarily as pejorative as it is perceived, Allen Wood argues that Stanley's undermining propaganda is an essential necessity of maintaining a stable society and, again, the legitimacy of the State. Wood's idea is that modernity, or our modern society, works in a way that essentially always “engages in a basic struggle with itself” in the name of progress (Wood 385). Society requires a certain amount of stability to function, and undermining propaganda can create just that. Wood remarks, “Flawed ideology interacts with people's needs to sustain their group identities, which preserve the condition for the only way of life for themselves that they are capable of understanding” (Wood 386). Wood is saying that undermining propaganda, the core concept of using flawed ideologies to pursue a goal that ultimately undermines its own ideal, does not stem from an intent to deceive. It speaks more to our paradoxical nature of wanting both changes (in the name of progress) and stability. In this

sense, undermining propaganda itself is only a showcase of our inherent human nature.

After some conceptual analysis of the nature of propaganda above, education seems like a fitting example. Education at a younger age for children and teenagers who have not developed their critical thinking skills well enough to think for themselves is essentially a form of propaganda. Aristotle's notion of habituation as an essential part in the cultivation of ethical virtue is a kind of propaganda with the goal to teach children ethical values. Parents play the role of authority and are there to teach children the right way to act, to think based on *ethos* and the role of the children, whose are still immature, are to follow guidance and imitate what is seen as virtuous (YU 522). The goal is to give children the necessary tool for them to become virtuous and rational people once their mind has matured. It is like teaching them reading comprehension and arithmetic now so that they can do taxes later. Internalizing social values in children gives them a frame of reference to reflect on later once they become more rational. Propaganda, under the form of habituation, is instrumental in shaping an individual's ethical framework.

Each country will instill its history embedded with ideologies and ethics that its government and collective public deem good to sustain their ideology as a collective entity. Although not an exact replication, there is a strikingly similar nature between

the relationship of parents vs children and state vs citizens. Mass persuasion by states to gain consent from the public is a mass habituation. Stanley articulated this point very well in how he wrote that “the social studies curriculum was largely a top-down effort to impose such an identity on students for the purposes of social control” (Stanley 474). The Constitution would not be sustainable to this day without propaganda through education. By instilling a respect for and compliance with laws, education indirectly reinforces the authority of the Constitution. Without individuals practicing and following laws, they remain mere abstract concepts. Therefore, education plays a crucial role in sustaining the efficacy of the Constitution. The relevancy of the Confederacy’s ideology, such as the State’s rights arguments, is the prime example of propaganda through education because that is how it is still being taught in some Southern States, like Georgia. I suspect that the notion of freedom in the US also facilitates the glorification of people who agree with the Confederacy, which objectively is on the wrong side of history. Germany would not be that enthusiastic to glorify Nazi Germany. To be fair, also thanks to that same propaganda on freedom that turned the US into the most diverse in terms of ethnicities and cultures that we usually refer to as a “melting pot.” If it is conceivable to see that education is a form of propaganda, it increases the potential that propaganda can do good.

In conclusion, this paper has tried to give a conceptual analysis on the nature of propaganda. After that, I discussed Stanley’s idea of undermining propaganda and civil rhetoric, which are instances of propaganda. If Wood’s interpretation is right, it is practically impossible to avoid propaganda because it is a part of our human nature to want to seek or create one. Finally, I end it by making a case that education is also a form of propaganda through Aristotle’s habituation as a fundamental part of ethical virtues. Instead of condemning propaganda, we should analyze it more and find ways to make it work for good purposes. Albert Camus once wrote, “It is always easy to be logical. It is almost impossible to be logical to the bitter end.” Long-term benefits are always logical, but the impulse to want short-term gains always seems to override that initial rationality. Society is a long-term plan that, maybe with the help of propaganda, individuals would put some more effort into developing it, which can potentially create a brighter future.

Work Cited

Forestal, Jennifer. "Beyond Gatekeeping: Propaganda, Democracy, and the Organization of Digital Publics." *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 83, no. 1, 2021, pp. 306–20. <https://doi.org/10.1086/709300>.

Hyzen, Aaron. "Revisiting the Theoretical Foundations of Propaganda." *International Journal of Communication* [Online], July 2021, pp. 3479+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A679119465/AONE?u=csudh&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=f2c17c97. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

Martin, James, "Antonio Gramsci", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/gramsci/>>.

Natal, Daniel. "MANIPULATING THE MASSES: Propaganda rooted in truth is a good thing, but propaganda based on lies to beguile and brainwash a population is something else entirely." *The New American*, vol. 38, no. 22, 28 Nov. 2022, pp. 29+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A728620098/AONE?u=csudh&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=370094da. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

Stanley, Jason. "How Propaganda Works, Precis." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 96, no. 2, 2018, pp. 470–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12426>.

Stanley, Jason. "Propaganda." *How Fascism Works: The Politics of US and Them*, Random House, 2018, pp. 24–35.

Wood, Allen. "Propaganda and Democracy." *Theoria: An International*

Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science, vol. 31, no. 3, 2016, pp. 381–94. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43974645>. Accessed 9 Dec. 2023.

YU, Jiyuan. "'Ethos' and Habituation in Aristotle." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2012, pp. 519–32. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44259412>. Accessed 4 May 2024.

TELOS

The Journal of Philosophy at California State University Dominguez Hills Spring 2024, Volume 5

Editor – Brian Gregor

Review Board – Dana Belu, Daniel Greenspan, Sheela Pawar

Editorial Assistant – Catherine Lopez

Telos is an official publication of the Philosophy department, with the support of the Philosophy Clun, at California State University Dominguez Hills. For more information on the journal or philosophical studies at California State University Dominguez Hills, please visit the department website at: www.csudh.edu/philosophy



California State University Dominguez Hills
Philosophy Department