

Ethics: An Incarcerated Person's Position

Hey!

A suicidal, homicidal,
apathetic, narcissistic,
Incarcerated
piece of shit

may or may not have

solved an important

ethical problem.

(I.e., is about to tell you how to live your life!)

Please read the following,

which probably would not

have been wrote had I

not come to prison:

A Meta-Ethic: The Answer to the Existential Problem

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Abstract

After establishing three self-evident propositions beginning at the *cogito*, an abstraction takes place that grants readers an objective standpoint from which to establish *a priori* ethical principles, and hence finally answer the Existential Problem. These principles are then used to form a meta-ethical system in a way that is conscious of each person's subjectivity and individual uniqueness, yet transcends each individual as being a part of a collective whole participating in world-hood and solidarity. Four premises for conduct (two of which are meta and two of which are practical) with a wide-range of applicability are found, the essence of human nature is shown to be something which is independent of what a person makes themselves to be (and thus does not change based on behavior), and real-life application is offered through reflective questioning and a short discussion on 'filling-the-gap.' All requirements suggested by Sherover are accounted for, and the work ends with a call to responsible action placed into the hands of each person reading.

Keywords Existentialism, Ethics, Meta-Ethics, Existential Problem, Human Nature in Existentialism, Essence of People

1 The Problem

Todd Lavin asserts that for an ethic to be existential it "cannot prescribe universal and generalizable moral duties" because it must arise from "the concrete insertion of the individual into the specific circumstances of his or her world" (2006, 62, 54). Moreover, Glenn Braddock pulls from Sartrean existential phenomenology the claim that because it is up to each individual to interpret the command they are given, "[f]illing the gap [from command to coherent action] is always the individual's responsibility" (2006, 97), which prevents abstract, universal principles from being "sufficient" to guide and justify a person's actions (2006, 97, 102). Indeed, the difficulty in creating a universal meta-ethic for existential philosophy is staggering because ethical life must be dealt with in experience (Adams 2014, 190), rather than abstraction, where 'real life' takes place, and 'real people' must make decisions. Therefore, what may seem like good ideals, such as Immanuel Kant's suggestion that one ought never to use another person as a mere means, but always as an end (2002, xviii), are considered so painfully ambiguous once one brings the ideal into the sphere of real-world-existence that they actually fail to give people an applicable answer for what to do in a given situation (Braddock 2006, 98). With the odds seemingly stacked against existentialists in regards to objectively establishing a normative ethic for human conduct, they are generally accused of having fallen into a relativism wherein each person is simply guided by his or her own values, thus leaving no way for people to criticize one another for making poor choices (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 272). Is the fate of existential ethics tethered indefinitely to relativism? Is an objective existential ethic possible? By developing an ethical system

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which begins at the *cogito*-in-action, moreover, an ethical system which incorporates, and relies on, all other *cogitos* living-in-the-world, an existential ethic will be made possible, and will be applicable to any possible human situation.

2 Human Nature, and First Meta-Principle

Because one's personal experience is their most basic, self-evident truth, all philosophy must begin with the 'I think' (Sartre 2001, 302; cp. Husserl 2001, 281).² Because the 'I think' cannot distinguish itself from a single sense perception, but requires a manifold perception upon which to make synthesizing judgements in order to constitute itself as separate from the object being perceived (Kant 2009, 174), the realization of the 'I think' is necessarily dependent on the world it perceives.^{3,4} Because this 'I think' must mandatorily be conceived as a thing-in-action (Sartre 2001, 300); moreover, because this thing-in-action has its most basic state understood *a priori* as [b]eing-in-the-world (Heidegger 2001, 222),⁵ the second self-evident truth in philosophical inquiry is that the world exists.⁶

As existing human-[b]eings-in-the-world, people's natural (i.e., naturally born, without any scientific/technological changes made to it) *a priori* physical constitution is generally the same as any other animal.⁷ This constitution is seen in there being certain limits placed upon people *a priori* which

² The 'I think' will be used interchangeably with the word '*cogito*,' which is simply one's mental epicenter which interprets a person's sense experiences into cognitions. Those who will deny that the *cogito* is a self-evident phenomenon are therefore, by their very denial, asserting that it is not obviously apparent to them that they experience anything and then think. This denial raises the question: under what circumstance, other than the one called 'being conscious,' can a mentally healthy person logically question, or deny, their ability to think? One's dogmatic denial of their own consciousness' self-evidency can only be asserted in a philosophical vacuum—it cannot be sustained in the real world, wherein we come to understand the existence of the 'I' in the first place. If one were to attempt to deny this self-evident truth, with what faculty would the denial be formulated? No person can evaluate a philosophical claim, or even any particular phenomenon-in-the-world at all, without possessing the ability to think; therefore, a non-existent *cogito* (i.e., cognitive, thinking perceiver) would lead people to unqualified nothingness, not philosophical research (such as this very article) and phenomenally-inspired cognitions (such as the thoughts and experiences which one has while reading these very words). However, if, after reading this footnote, one is still not convinced that their own ability to think is self-evident, it is probably best if such a one takes a break from their philosophical meandering and gets involved in the real world, free from philosophical ridiculousness, whence they can encounter the thing that people call 'life,' wherein their own existence is to be unquestionably found. (See Wittgenstein 1999, 30; Brenner 1999, 60; Catalano 2010, 12; and, most importantly, Kolk 2015, 88-104, who shows that one who has lost touch with their 'self' is in a state which is clinically unhealthy, and may have drastic consequences)

³ Cp. Bessel van der Kolk: "After birth, physical sensation defines our relationship to ourselves and to our surroundings. We start off *being* our wetness, hunger, satiation, and sleepiness" (2015, 95-96; original emphasis)

⁴ If you are of the ilk that you are, perhaps, nothing more than a brain in a vat (or some other hyper-skeptical scenario such as this), and that everything which you think is real may merely be an electrical impulse sent to you by a computer, then I challenge you to prove that the following account is *not* a set of imperatives sent directly to you from the One who controls your experience. Unless you can disprove the possibility of the following account coming from said Master Controller, I suggest you take heed to what is argued for in this article lest you anger your Lord.

⁵ '[b]eing-in-the-world' will be used to distinguish the [b]eing of one's individual humanity from the Being of collective existence.

⁶ See also Husserl 2001, 289.

⁷ Comparable to Sartre's idea of "facticity" (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 258).

they cannot supersede—they are contingent, i.e., they require food, water, and oxygen to survive; moreover, they are hindered from certain activities by the limits of their physical body's own natural characteristics such as being able to fly using *only* the body which they are.⁸ Now, because all animals are apparently born in infancy, mature as time passes and, assuming no tragedy has befallen them, make their way into adulthood which is then followed by (relatively speaking) old-age and death, it may be reasonably concluded that this sequence of events is the 'normal' state of affairs which is the animal life, and are part of what it means to be a contingent animal *a priori*.⁹ These *a priori* features are universal characteristics which all beings regarded as 'animals' share, and each distinct species has its own unique way of fulfilling these requirements of animal-ness. However, besides their unique physical constitution known as the 'human body,' it is humanity's very high capacity for ontologically projective transcendence,¹⁰ a possibility believed to arise from the possession of a high-capacity cerebral cortex (Kenrick et. al. 2010, 25), which is their most distinctive feature to consider when separating them from other classes of animals.¹¹ Indeed, along with the human body and its *a priori* animal-ness, it is exactly the *possibility* of the limitless ontological possibilities which people are capable of (Heidegger 2001, 214; cp. Husserl 2001, 288), and hence the human body's natural possession of a highly-transcendent *cogito* (Husserl 2001, 284-85, 286), that is the 'human nature' which so many have tried to deny (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 256) as existing in a static sense (MacLaren 2006, 159). It is true that as individuals take on this-or-that role they can be defined as doing such-and-such thing (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 197); however, the unchanging fact that, in the state considered 'healthy' or 'normal,' humans are entities which have *the possibility to choose any-such role over another* (a choice-for-another available because of the highly transcendent *cogito*, and available even if choosing requires them to learn skills unlike anything they have ever previously encountered), makes this very possibility to choose such a wide array of functions *the fundamental property of human-nature-in-itself's*¹² ontological aspect *a priori*, which therefore entails that human-nature does not rely on any particular role to determine its essence.¹³ In this

⁸ In this respect, each individual animal has its own physical limitations: where people cannot (naturally) fly using the natural constitutions they are born with, a bird cannot (naturally) live under water, and an earth-worm cannot (naturally) do jumping-jacks, etc. Cp. Christine Daigle's account of Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of freedom (2006, 130), as well as Kym MacLaren's remarks on Merleau-Ponty's 'embodiment' (2006, 153)

⁹ Cp. William Brenner's account of Aristotelian non-reductivism (1999, 1-3)

¹⁰ Ontologically-Projective Transcendence is a person's ability to use future anticipations to change/overcome (i.e., 'transcend') whatever situation they were born into/are currently facing (as opposed to the 'lower' animals, who are shackled to the monotony of an instinctually-driven existence) by choosing various actions/behaviors which help them progress in life towards the indeterminate future.

¹¹ Cp. Sartre's idea of "transcendence" (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 258)

¹² A thing 'in-itself' refers to its objective, foundational characteristics, and hence is the essence of the thing without qualification.

¹³ Camus was close to this when he stated: "Freud is a heretic thinker and a 'petit bourgeois' because he brought to light the unconscious and bestowed on it at least as much reality as on the super or social ego. This unconscious mind can therefore define the originality of a human nature opposed to the historic ego" (1956)

way, yes, existence *does* precede essence in certain respects because one's physical constitution precedes their developing character; however, in light of understanding the harnessed *potential* for a human's vast ontological possibilities even before any specific choices are made, as well as the unique physical structure which is the human body with its relations to the animal *a priori*, as being the sufficient components which constitute what is human-nature-in-itself, Jean Paul Sartre's famous statement must be qualified as follows: *The existence of a human-in-itself precedes any additional essence developed through a person being-for-itself.*^{14, 15}

Without the above qualification, being a human predisposes one to the possibility of becoming what one is not—what Sartre calls “bad faith” (2001, 329). This ‘bad faith’ is a psycho-ontological state of being which apparently only affects humans, arising from the various roles played out through projective transcendence, and a state which is combated by a person's use of the nihilating principle (Sartre 2001, 320).¹⁶ When a person has succumbed to the state known as ‘bad faith,’ a person has lost touch with their ‘self,’ and has become completely identified with their societal roles, causing them to, for instance, say that they ‘are’ a waiter in the same sense that a book ‘is’ a book. Sartrean ontology rightly denies that a person is a waiter in the same sense that a book is a book (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 269), and therefore Sartre stresses the fact that people are merely ‘playing’ particular roles that they come to identify with if they are not self-reflective or “critical” of their situation-in-life (Linsenbard 2010, 56ff). However, aside from one's need to think critically about their situation-in-life in order to keep them from being consumed by their societal roles, what also must be considered is that even when one is “playing at being a waiter in a café” (Sartre 2001, 336), this one who is ‘playing’ is always acting through their own ontically¹⁷ unique humanness, and thus in their own ontologically unique existence as a “thinking thing” (Descartes 2008, 61 §86).¹⁸ Owing to each individual person acting through their unique ontic humanness, anytime one projects their historicity into futurity (Heidegger 2001, 217)¹⁹ there is no escaping of one's

¹⁴ Whereas the phrase ‘in-itself’ is used to indicate a thing is being discussed objectively/foundationally, the phrase ‘for-itself’ indicates a thing is being discussed in its mode of performing volitional/transcendental acts.

¹⁵ This means that a child in the womb with a *tabula rasa* is the embodiment of the sufficient requirements of what it means to be a human-in-itself without depending on being “in the way” (Linsenbard 2010, 36) of another's experience (Sartre 2001, 351) to determine it as so (Catalano 2010, 19), and therefore means that a fetus possesses human-nature-in-itself (thus making it a human). How this child develops its additional characteristics (that is, makes itself what it is “through the way that [it] lives” [MacLaren 2006, 159]) is discussed in what follows.

¹⁶ The ‘nihilating principle’/‘negation’ is the ability to say ‘no,’ perceive a thing as being ‘nothing’/‘destroyed,’ and to call the world into question, etc. (Linsenbard 2010, 27)

¹⁷ “To consider an entity *ontically* means to consider its particular characteristics as a particular entity or particular kind of entity, whereas to consider that entity *ontologically* means to consider that entity's way of being” (Cerbone 2008, 6)

¹⁸ Because one's ontic humanness possesses the three sufficient components of the human-in-itself (human body, *a priori* animal-ness, and *cogito*)

¹⁹ A ‘historicity’ is a person's past experiences, which uniquely molds them into who they currently are at any present moment. When a person is performing the mental operation of planning for the future/deciding to act (i.e., what is known as ‘transcendence’), that person (and, hence, their entire past because they, in the ‘now,’ *are* the

humanity-in-itself because the only way to completely negate one's own body—with its intrinsic nature—is in death.²⁰ Now, since one's motivational systems are layered, i.e., new habits coexist with old ones, rather than replace them, leaving each one to become automatically activated when relevant situations are encountered that trigger them (Kenrick et. al. 2010, 26; cp. Kolk 2015, 2), one's actions will always contain the culmination of all of their 'self' as the capstone of any historical event coming from that person (Cp. Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 201). Moreover, as genetics and gene-environment interactions set the trajectory for the natural stature and potential mental possibilities of one's growing mind (Fifer 2005, 173-179); and, likewise, because one's childhood from times unmemorable has shaped them in ways which have definitively formed their thinking process to act and react with certain behaviors they may not be completely conscious of in their adult life (Daryl and Jung 1991, s.v. "Repression"); then these sub-conscious traits are part of each person's ontologically-unique personality prior to them making any conscious choice of being-for-itself because the traits are a part of their projected historicity whether they even understand themselves to possess such things or not. The fact of these sub-conscious realities, combined with the above Sartrean qualification, mean that an understanding of existential-human-nature should not start at 'nothingness' (Sartre 2001, 293), for as people become engrossed in their actions (Sartre 2001, 348) they may mentally *lose track* of their humanness and historicity by not cognizantly bearing in mind that they are a unique, conscious human body performing the actions they are undertaking,²¹ but the very fact that they are performing these actions at all, and doing these actions *their way*, derives *a posteriori* from their existence as a unique human body with a specific historicity. Therefore people are not just their actions, as some would say (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 197), they are all *unique and specific human beings performing their actions*, which entails that they can never be concluded as being a 'nothing,' and must have their nature understood accordingly.

Ontic and ontological identities are *very* intimately bound, and being in the human body *a priori* determines the type of actions which people are naturally capable of (Cp. Adams 2014, 194; Daigle 2006, 130; MacLaren 2006, 153). The way that one's actions are performed portray a certain degree of their essence of character, their own particular "style" (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 118), which is the culmination and coexistence of one's past with the present, and acted out through that individual's particular ontic body to the outside world. The qualified understanding of an ontically-unique-human-in-itself with a perpetually culminating historicity who possesses the potential to choose any particular mode

product of their past) envisions/plans ('projects') their-self doing some *thing* in the 'future,' which ultimately takes place in the 'now.' Therefore, projecting one's historicity into futurity is basically saying "when someone is/plans on doing something" in a way that emphasizes how the past affects the present.

²⁰ Because one can only perform existential, historic-future-projection when embodied (as far as we know empirically/scientifically speaking), which necessitates the existence of the human-in-itself.

²¹ And hence be defined by such actions.

of being-for-itself because of their unique *cogito* would keep a person, for example, 'Sophi,' from ever simply being-a-waiter, which is 'bad faith,' and demand that they, for instance, be acknowledged ontically as the person who is 'Sophi-waiting' rather than 'Sophi-the-waiter.' This redesignation of 'Sophi the waiter' as 'Sophi-waiting' prevents the unique individual known by the name of 'Sophi' from becoming just another cog in the machine of existence whose role could be replaced by any other person (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, xxxiii) because it underscores her ontic and ontologically unique personhood—her 'Sophi-ness'—rather than her role as a waiter.

Sophi, as a human-in-itself, is ontically unique, and is an embodied ontological cogito unlike any other that is, or has ever been, in existence. Even though the roles she takes on may slightly modify her behavior,²² she will always have her *cogito* (that is, her self-reflective consciousness) to 'reconnect' with when mediating between roles as she performs the "nihilating withdrawal" (Sartre 2001, 319) necessary to move from one mode of operation to the next.^{23, 24} When this ontically-unique-human-body + ontologically-unique-*cogito* with unique, perpetually-culminating historicity is in nihilating suspension,²⁵ Sophi's personality is temporarily stripped away from any external, action-based mode of her being-for-itself,²⁶ and what is left is a unique essence which can never be reduplicated.^{27, 28} This unique essence which can never be reduplicated is the ontic-ontological person who is 'Sophi,' and is the culmination of her unique historicity as experienced through her ontologically-unique-*cogito* residing in her ontically-unique body without any temporary/additional characteristics added through currently-active external role fulfillments. Her ontic characteristics²⁹ are hers alone,³⁰ and her ontological personality is one-of-a-kind—they have both been formed through the life of a particular human-body-in-itself, but have become so unquestionably unique that they ultimately constitute what may now be called by others 'Sophi-in-itself.'

²² I.e., her etiquette when performing the being-for-itself role of a heart-surgeon will, hopefully, not be presented with the same formality she would use if she were performing the role of a bar-tender. Moreover, the experiences she undergoes may very well shape her personality over a long time of performing these certain tasks.

²³ The 'nihilating withdrawal' is a conscious refrain from external action that begins interior activities such as contemplation. Thus Sophi always intimately 'reconnects' with her cogito after this withdrawal is performed because conscious cessation from external action leaves self-reflective thought as the activity taking its place in the ever-present 'now.'

²⁴ It is said that Sophi 'reconnects' with her *cogito* because she may become so engrossed in her actions that she does not think to herself while performing them (what sports players call 'being in the zone'), and thus by stopping her actions she then begins thinking to, and possibly about, her self.

²⁵ I.e., when Sophi has ceased from external action and is doing no other activity but 'thinking' to herself.

²⁶ I.e., any current, external role she may be performing the actions of. Cp. Sartre's claim that nihilation suspends one from Being (2001, 319 ff.)

²⁷ I.e., removing Sophi from her roles when discussing her gives one the means to speak about the essence of Sophi as the unique person she has made herself to be, and *then*, if they wish, to contemplate how her unique personality may affect the various roles she takes part in.

²⁸ The essence of Sophi's personality is so individually unique that it can never be perfectly reduplicated by any other person.

²⁹ Such as her physical beauty.

³⁰ Though someone may *resemble* her they will never be *exactly* her.

The human-in-itself, however, has *not* been replaced by the Sophi-in-itself; on the contrary, what has happened is the human body, from youth to adulthood, has matured over time, taking on unique physical characteristics, and the *cogito* has developed a unique personality.³¹ Though this adult unique body and unique *cogito* are not *exactly* the same as they were in childhood,³² they are *still* the outgrowth of the essential components of human-body with *a priori* animal-ness + *cogito* she was originally formed with in-utero, and therefore the uniquely-developed *cogito*-personality of Sophi—whether taking on any role of being-for-itself or not—still possesses in her unique human body her *same* human-nature *a priori* she has had since the womb,³³ and may be identified by others as the ‘same’ person over the course of her life because she is, primarily, the *same* unique *cogito*/human body that she was at birth although she has undergone so much ontic/ontological development through her growth and experiences. The fact that she is *still* a human, and not a ‘Sophi,’ though she *is* Sophi, is understood because being a human-in-itself does not depend on the presence of any *particular* personality, nor any *particular* physical body, but on the sole fact that there exists a human-body with *a priori* animal-ness + *cogito*, which is *then* qualified in light of the unique features that others know to be ‘Sophi’s’ characteristics. In other words, it is not that there is no human-nature because “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (Sartre 2001, 293), it is that 1) human-nature; and 2) a particular human’s unique constitutions (whether in-itself or for-itself); should be discussed as *two separate essences* which, however so intimately related and inter-dependent, are still removed from one another by a *very* fine distinction which has apparently been overlooked until now.³⁴ Sophi is therefore, just like everyone else, a human-in-itself; however, no one else can do any action exactly like she does because *she* brings to each action the unique essence of *her* non-reduplicatable body and character, which is the Sophi-in-itself, when she is in the mode of being-for-itself. What is more, Sophi is a special individual if for no other reason than the ‘simple’ fact that she exists—no one, *contra* Martin Heidegger (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, xxxiii), can ever take her place.

Now, because each individual person is a specific [b]eing-in-the-world whose predetermined thrownness (Heidegger 2001, 237) ultimately consummates in a solitary [b]eing-towards-death (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 201), the inescapable ending of the human-in-itself which, although each individual’s alone to face, is unequivocally experienced by all humans (Heidegger 2001, 246-251), it can be said that people, whose very being contains the constitution of negation (Sartre 2001, 320), have their third self-evident truth for philosophical inquiry which also happens to be an intrinsic component of being

³¹ Keep in mind, again, Aristotelian non-reductivism (Brenner 1999, 1-3) when reading the following.

³² I.e., in size or character, etc.

³³ I.e., she has not changed bodies or *cogitos* with another—she has simply developed.

³⁴ This distinction of two separate ‘essences’ places the human-in-itself into the realm of ‘nature,’ essence,’ or ‘form,’ and places the unique personality/traits of the individual into the traditional idea of a ‘person’ in Existentialism, which has “no pregiven essence or form [to] live up to,” but “invites us to define ourselves through the ways that we live, the acts we engage in” (MacLaren 2006, 150)

a contingent-animal-in-the-world *a priori*—death. Because the ‘I think,’ the world, and death are three self-evident truths; moreover, because ‘destruction’ is arguably “an *objective fact* and not a thought” (Sartre 2001, 315; original emphasis) one can see that the *cogito* (that is, each individual person subjectively) should find as its most important task the negating of its own destruction (cp. Camus 1956, 139).

Now, because the ‘I think’ relies on the world; moreover, because the world contains *other* [b]eings-in-the-world which are necessary for the procreation of the human species, and hence the perpetuation of the existence of an indefinite amount of other *cogitos*, then preservation of the world is a task which supersedes the preservation of just one *cogito*, because destruction of the world entails the destruction of all other selves, and is thus the objective starting point for establishing an ethical system in existential philosophy. From the realization of this objective starting point, one may now uncover a “supreme principle” *a priori*, i.e., a moral law, from which to begin drawing existential, practical principles:³⁵ *People should always conduct themselves in a way that is beneficial to the world.*

3 Value, and Second Meta-Principle

With the first meta-principle established, the question will inevitably arise: Because of peoples’ inclination to distort laws to agree with their own desire (Kant 2002, 21), how can societies try to ensure that humans will abide by this principle? According to prevalent psychological theories, people’s actions will reflect what they see as possessing the most value in their lives (Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 520; Kenrick et. al. 2010; cp. Freud 1990, 767-802); therefore, the next task, after finding value for the world *a priori*, is to establish value for the earth in the eyes of her beholders, and follow this value-establishing train-of-thought unto a second meta-ethical standard.

The immediate experience which is one’s existing perception takes place as a self-reflective consciousness which experiences all of a person’s sensory data as information/cognitions which are then usually grouped into categories with other perceptions that are akin to them in some way (cp. Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 173, 267, 296). This self-reflective consciousness is known as the *cogito*, and its perception is said to be ‘immediate’ because it is a perpetually-culminating event with future anticipations that enable it to be consciously attentive in the ‘now’ as long as it remains in existence. As cognitive, thinking things who perceive objects using the sense experiences known as perceptions, people understand there to be things which are fashioned in ways that have been elaborately constituted prior to their perceiving them—i.e., they encounter things that are distinct from their perceptions-in-themselves (i.e., things which are outside of their *cogito* and its interpretations of things) as they are perceived by them to be: they do not bring these things into existence themselves through their perception of them, nor

³⁵ Cp. Kant’s method @ 2002, 8.

do they dictate what these things-in-themselves are—they only determine the judgments they make about them.^{36, 37}

It is not that one's perceiving essence constitutes things outside of it by its own volition to create, it is that each individual comes to understand, as best they can, what things are through their experience of them (Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 296). In viewing a tree, one sees its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and possibly acorns. People understand all of these components to be a 'tree' because the characteristics which it possesses (it is made out of wood, it grows in the particular manner that all plants do, it has leaves, branches, and the like) are the same characteristics which they encounter in *other* objects that they themselves, and society, have deemed to be akin to it by mutual trait recognition, therefrom constituting the idea of 'tree-ness' (cp. Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 298-300). In perceiving one tree, individuals do not yet have the necessary requirements to dictate a meta-category of tree-ness—they have but one tree. However, upon experiencing *other* objects not physically grafted to the solitary tree which also share the fundamental characteristics that the solitary tree possesses, humans come to understand that tree-ness is also the characteristic of *other* objects which are then deemed in one's mind to be objects of a similar nature.³⁸ This tree-ness is now a part of a person's categorical vocabulary in the mind *a priori*, and is what has been called a 'universal' category because of its metaphysical nature. It is through this understanding of universal tree characteristics that one comes to see what constitutes a tree which is alive, or a tree which is dead, and can likewise determine, i.e., *judge*, for themselves what, exactly, is the type of tree that they are dealing with. Thus said, people *perceive*, people *think*, and people are in a *world* which contains *objects* that they *judge*.

In one's judging of a thing, a person will generally begin by determining the thing's spacio-temporal limits in reference to whatever idea of 'normalcy' they may have constituted *a priori* in their mind through their past experiences by making both analytic and synthetic judgements (Kant 1992, 186). One can tell that the object they are perceiving is a dog standing *next to* a tree, and not be led to believe that the dog is an extension *of* the tree, because they have determined that dogs do not grow on trees as the 'normal' course of events would allow (cp. Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 298-300). In this way, a person understands one object as distinct from another by making two analytic judgements (this is a tree-in-itself; this is a dog-in-itself) along with a third synthetic, nihilating judgement of division (this is 'not'), and putting each individual object in a categorical class which is gradually modified as they experience

³⁶ I.e., people do not (normally) assume that a tree they stumble upon in the woods is there because they somehow caused it to be there by their mental actions (unless they planted its seed, of course)

³⁷ Cp. Kant 2002, 67. This reference to Kant is not to say that one apprehends the Kantian idea of the thing-in-itself through their perception. The claim here is that the thing-in-itself *is* the manifestation which a person then subjectively perceives as an object through its 'being-there.'

³⁸ Cp. Xunzi in Littlejohn 2016, 85; Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 298-300.

different instances of the object under question, or even objects which are *outside* of the category which they are determining for their self. One may say a dog is 'big' in relevance to its own category (i.e., the Great Dane is 'big' compared to the Chihuahua) or in reference to another kind (a dog is 'big' when compared to a cat); moreover, they may say a thing is 'old' in reference to its own category (a dog is 'old' when it is alive for over twelve years) or in reference to another kind (a dog dies 'fast' when compared to the life of people). In the first example, big-ness is a spacial determination, while the second, old-ness, is a temporal one. Moreover, these judgements become analytic when one understands that the 'dog' is an 'animal,' and synthetic when they say that the 'dog' is 'old.'³⁹ Because the human *cogito*, that is, human consciousness, resides in the human body, people become aware of sensations (for example, perceived itches or pains) which affect the body in which they reside.⁴⁰ These analytic/synthetic, spacio-temporal judgments in regard to things outside of one's *cogito*, whether inside or outside of the body, aid one in determining that they are a unique individual-in-the-world whose life experiences are encountered through their unique human body. Therefore, the possibility exists for people to make analytic/synthetic, spacio-temporal judgements regarding the objects which they encounter in and outside of their own human body as perceived through their existing perceiver (i.e., *cogito*).

Now, using these analytic/synthetic, spacio-temporal judgments regarding things in and outside of their own human body, a person may also determine the 'quality' (and hence, value) of a thing as they perceive it to be in reference to *other* objects of a similar or different nature. When one judges a thing to be a 'dog' or to be a 'cat,' they either do so in regards to their first experience of a thing, or do so using their past experiences regarding what 'dog-ness' or 'cat-ness' consists of. When determining an object to be a 'dog,' and not a 'cat,' people are making two analytic judgements (this is a dog-in-itself; this is a cat-in-itself) along with a third synthetic, nihilating judgement of division (this is 'not'). However, the determination of a 'healthy' cat from a 'sick' cat is dependent on one's experiencing of a various number of cats and synthetically determining what is the 'best' state for them to be in as cats.⁴¹ If a cat is so fat that it cannot not move fast enough to catch a rat, a person would determine that this cat is 'unhealthy' because, for example (and among other reasons), its state hinders it from being able to survive alone in Nature. Moreover, because all contingent creatures require food to exist, if a cat could not consume food without vomiting it back up one would determine it to be 'sick.' Now, because most people have personally experienced the sickness which does not allow them to keep down their food, and have

³⁹ Cp. Yirmiyahu Yovel's examples: analytic judgments are tautologous and explicative, such as "my uncle is a relative of mine"; a synthetic judgement is "my uncle is a relative of the mayor" (2018, 23-24), wherein "mayor" was previously unknown in regards to the uncle.

⁴⁰ How this experience ultimately takes place (i.e., is it the body or the mind that feels the sensation) is not an immediate concern of this work. One would do well to refer to Brenner/Wittgenstein 1999, 48.

⁴¹ This is not to say that this is the only way to determine a cat is sick—it is just a simple opening statement chosen because of its expediency.

henceforth (presumably) deemed this state of sickness as unpleasant, they can determine the state that the sick cat is in to be a 'bad' state for the cat. Moreover, having met people who suffer from obesity, or any other type of disease for that matter, and understanding that they do not necessarily enjoy (for various reasons) the predicament in which they find themselves, one can likewise judge an obese or diseased cat which is unhealthy to also be in a 'bad' state, and that the cat which is in the 'healthy' and 'normal' state is in a 'good' state according to one's own subjective observations of cat-ness, other people, and their own self-reflection. These qualitative determinations in regard to cats and people give observers a sense of 'value' regarding these particular kinds of objects,⁴² and likewise determine observer's behavior in regard to these things:⁴³ One may value their personal health over sickness, and thus they are inclined to monitor their diet; moreover, they may value the happiness of their cat, and they therefore ensure the cat is taken care of. However, these value determinations are not limited to cats, health, or people—values are given to *everything* that a person can perceive.

It has been argued by Camus that because the *cogito* is the source upon which all philosophy relies on to be conducted that the existence of a person is a good thing (1956, 6). However, it could be said that rather than seeing the existence of people as a necessary good because the conduction of philosophy is reliant upon their high-capacity mental transcendence, it is more appropriate to say that the existence of the human as a value-giving-entity makes the human being, forgive the word play, value-able. A person that is value-able is a person that is able to give value to things, but is it only the human that is value-able? Do not all animals show that they value food over hunger? Does not an insect show value for the safety of the colony in its defensive measures? No mentally healthy animals (at least that I have seen) willingly seek misery as an end-in-itself; therefore, it must necessarily follow that all creatures, whether able to show it in a way that humans can understand or not, value happiness/contentment.⁴⁴ It should therefore be apparent—to claim that it is only humans that are value-able would be a misconception which narrows the focus of a philosophical contemplation onto just one aspect of existence;⁴⁵ namely, onto just people. Thus said, if, as Sartre argues, the existence of values is determinate upon a conscious entity to perceive a thing as good or bad, as intact or destroyed, or as existing or non-existent (Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 260, et. al.), then the existence of all creatures

⁴² I.e., because a person has experienced sickness, they now value health. Moreover, they value the health of their animal because they do not want the creature they love to suffer.

⁴³ Cp. Julian Rotter's *Expectancy Theory* of behavior/personality (Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 520), as well as Merleau-Ponty's 'embodiment' restrictions (MacLaren 2006, 147, 152, 153)

⁴⁴ Cp. also Dutch American ethologist and zoologist Frans de Waal's conversation revealing that although "we don't yet have a grand theory of [animal] cognition," the scientific community is finally leaning toward accepting the claim that 'non-human' animals share all of the emotions that we do (2020, 5-15)

⁴⁵ A misconception which ecologist and author Carl Safina says is an extension of Descartes' philosophy (2020,46; cp. De Waal)

which can *function* in the capacity to suggest they understand these things are hence value-able whether their mental capabilities allow them to be self-reflective to the point of cognizant value-giving or not.

Now, because all creatures which have the capacity for values give value to the objects that are outside of their perceiving essences, and hence, whether consciously or not, their very-own-selves,⁴⁶ it can be said that all objects which are in the world have, *a priori*, the *possibility to possess* value.^{47, 48} One may not consciously value the ground that they walk on; however, it is the *soil* which produces the *plants* which they need for *food*, a food which they have value for, which *thence* gives rise to the soil's *own* value as the source of humanity's nourishment. Moreover, certain types of ground may be harnessed and fixed into brick fixtures to be used for the building of a home; how much more, then, is the ground of value to the ant? What of the ant to the vermilingua? What of the *death* of the vermilingua to the fly? If it can be said that through people's experience with various soils, and hence their understanding the need for compost to help Nature flourish, without saying that the soil-in-itself 'values' the death of the vermilingua into which the vermilingua composts, it *can* be said, through humanity's value-giving, judgmental essence, that the death, and thus decay and composting, of the vermilingua is *valuable* for the soil. Thus said, as creatures exist as value-giving, judgmental entities-in-the-world, all things in the world, in some form or another, naturally possess some type of value *a priori* for the creatures that exist in it whether or not it is consciously determined to even be there for them in the first place.

All of the above may now be summarized as finding that: People *perceive*, people *think*, and people are in a *world* with *other* creatures that all give their *own* certain values to the objects that people *also* judge. Because people judge, moreover, because values are given through *other* creatures whether they realize they are even cognizantly doing so or not, *the world, and all it contains, is valuable a priori because of every living creature's existence in it whether or not they even realize it yet.*

Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus insist that people need to "use [their] ruling principle to keep [them]selves in harmony with [N]ature" (Holiday and Hanselman 2016, 400). However, in the quest for strictly-human flourishing, humanity has turned Mother Earth into a prostitute, and the entire animal kingdom, which people are all an actual part of, into an object that is compartmentally distinct from them simply because it is not human.⁴⁹ Historian Nick Estes enlightens his readers to the fact that in the Lakota

⁴⁶ When one seeks food, it is because they care about their nourishment; if they seek shelter, they show that they care about their comfort; therefore, in searching out these things they value, creatures also show that they value their-selves, and prefer contentment/happiness over pain/suffering.

⁴⁷ Cp. what follows to Kornfield's wasps (1993, 315) and *Meditations* 6.14; 7.17.

⁴⁸ Cp. Daigle's summary of Beauvoir's 'Ambiguity': "It [meaning] will be won by the individual's movement of transcendence, which will act upon the world and make it, as well as our own existence, meaningful" (2006, 128)

⁴⁹ Cp. de Waal: "I've never liked that word [nonhuman], as if they are unfortunate creatures who have the bad luck to be not human—as if we are the center of the universe. Why not refer to ourselves as 'nonelephant'? [Laughs.]"

Indian language there is no word for Nature, and the term used for humans, *Oyáte*, may be interchangeably used for “non-humans” as well (2020, 10)—this is a concept philosophers have certainly not given enough attention to in the West. By ‘civilizing’ the world, humans have removed themselves from their very Origin, which is one of Being-from-Nature. This removal from Nature will only continue to grow more distant as people become more technologically advanced. This technological split from Nature is not a good thing, for if people ever forget that they, too, are just a highly capable member of the animal kingdom, they will forsake the very heritage which they have come to possess.⁵⁰ The expression provided by Estes, along with biologist Mark Moffett’s observation that when certain animals are ‘humanized,’ rather than ‘animalizing’ humans, people tend to be more sympathetic towards their situation-in-life than they do animals which lack characteristics such as emotional facial features (2020, 9-10), helps provide societies a trajectory for the psychological aspects needed to create a worldview which would encourage people to value the world, and to consider benefiting this world as they benefit themselves: What societies must do is come to realize, and teach, that the divide between civilization and Nature is a divide that is artificial and, rather than simply qualifying humanity to the status of animal (Moffett 2020, 9-10), exalt the status of land and beast to that of ‘co-inhabitants of existence.’ Hannah Arendt was certainly headed in the right direction when she sought to save people from the dehumanizing effects of modernity’s philosophy (Schulman 2006, 72); however, she should have continued her campaign of restorative justice even further and saved the earth, as well as all living organisms it contains, from being constituted as raw material-at-hand used solely for humanities means-to-an-end.⁵¹ In freeing all things in the world from the clutches of the cold objectivity of means, humanity will bring dignity to these things’ existence. By dignifying (not necessarily *deifying*) everything that exists *with* humans, people will become better stewards of their heritage because this dignifying would help ensure that all things, big and small, will be handled with care.⁵²

Now, because humans, being the most transcendently advanced of the animal kingdom, have inherited a valuable world which they must now handle with care, the self-interested flourishing of people must then be bridled by the qualification that it also seeks to do the smallest amount of harm possible to the environment as it strives to flourish because humanity must also keep the valuable world’s best

⁵⁰ Cp. Charles Sherover’s requirement for historic heritage (“Founding an Existential Ethic,” in *Human Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 3 Jul.-Sep., 1981. 223-236; 234). Humanity ‘possessing’ the world as their ‘heritage’ arises from the fact that they are the most transcendently-advanced species, and thus hold the most power/influence over the earth than any other creature.

⁵¹ Cp. Camus: “when [N]ature ceases to be an object of contemplation and admiration, it can then be nothing more than material for an action that aims at transforming it” (1956, 299). We may also take time here to modify Immanuel Kant’s Formula of Humanity as End in Itself (2002, 46, 47): Act so that you use the world, as much in your own person as in the ‘person’ of every existing thing, always at the same time as an end and never merely as means.

⁵² Cp. Hedeggerian/Sheroverian need for ‘care’ (Sherover 1981, 234)

interest in mind—a qualification only possible because of humanities possession of nihilating transcendence. This qualification has led us to a second moral law which is also in line with Ockham's Razor: *Any pursuit in human flourishing must always be refined if the same task can also be done in a way that is more beneficial for, or less damaging to, the environment.*⁵³

4 Practical Principles

Having derived these two objective ethical imperatives, it is now the task to show why humans can be held accountable for being ethical, and then extract practical principles for all human-[b]eings-in-the-world (cp. Kant 2002, 27). As seen above, the essence of a particular person's humanity is a constitution which contains one's particular ontic structure, as well as the possession of projective and nihilating transcendence which bears with it the totality of its historicity as a thinking thing. Now, the (natural) ontic quality of one's body—small or large, male or female, etc.—would determine whether they would be able to, say, crawl through a certain size hole or carry a child in their womb for nine months, yet would *not* determine whether or not they are a nice person (cp. Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 257).⁵⁴ People have the freedom to choose how they represent themselves to the world in regards to their ontological essence of *character*, a freedom bore upon the shoulders of nihilation (Sartre 2001, 324, 301), and, likewise, a character that is understood through the actions that each individual chooses to perform. However, what people *cannot* choose (again, in regards to the natural, physical constitution they are born with, without any scientific/technological advances they may be able to change their natural body with) are, for example, ontic features such as the type of nose which genetically grows on one's face. This intimate connection of the qualities of the human-in-itself with one's unique ontic variants⁵⁵ is why humans cannot logically hold others at fault for being short. However, people's ontological freedom in respect to their being-for-itself manifested in action allows one to consider another immoral for not adhering to guidelines set forth regarding how people are to conduct themselves in ways which are in line with any principles determined to benefit the world.

Now, because each human carries within their-self the process of nihilation and, more importantly, because this process of nihilation grants each human the possibility of choice, the very first practical principle which may be derived from our objective meta-standards of world preservation would then be the reoccurring existentialist claim to responsibility. Sartre was correct in noting that people “condemned to be free carr[y] the weight of the whole world on [their] shoulders” (2001, 352) because

⁵³ As the push for simplicity is entailed in standing against the technological split, this meta-principle stresses the need to re-evaluate what we have already built and reconstruct it in a way that does less damage to our ecosystem.

⁵⁴ Cp. also, and again, Daigle on Beauvoir (2006, 130), and MacLaren on Merleau-Ponty (2006, 153)

⁵⁵ I.e., one's unique physical characteristics which outwardly distinguish them from other humans, and which are given to them (and no other) when they are conceived.

the responsibility expounded in this essay must start with responsibility towards the entire world humanity lives in, and therefore is a responsibility regarding all that the world contains from the largest mountain to the smallest organism. This responsibility-towards-the-world arising out of the first meta-principle must also take into account the second meta-principle, which would henceforth entail moderate measures regarding fossil fuels, de-forestation, etc., and likewise moderation on things such as population increase and over-all *pleonexia* because it is humanity's unbridled pursuit for 'more' which has gotten the world into the sad situation it is in today.

Human nature, as the united human-body with *a priori* animal-ness + *cogito*, is, like all animals, inherently self-interested. Self-interest is the innate desire for a conscious entity to care for its self, fulfill its desires, or follow its values and, in-itself, is neither good nor bad until the means or ends which are sought are qualified as being so (cp. Pahman 2016, 3; Schneewind 2002, 89).⁵⁶ *Pleonexia*, or, the desire to do/have more and out-do/have more than others, is a direct result of the appetitive nature which arises necessarily from a contingent existence (*Rep.* 8.558d10-e), and is ultimately seeking self-interest no matter what the cost is to others.⁵⁷ Plato divided the appetitive nature into the categories of necessary, which consists of things such as food and water, and unnecessary, in which things such as the drive for monetary gain for the sake of luxury are placed (*Rep.* 8.558d10; 8.559b10-d). The very first desires that a human understands must be fulfilled are those involving the necessary appetites—as early as eight weeks old a fetus pairs its in-utero sense experience with their mother's food consumption (Fifer 2005, 175-176)—and it is the repeated fulfillment of these necessary needs that give rise to a child's eventual seeking out of their own satisfaction. Children learn from their mother the pangs of hunger and the happiness of eating before they are even born (Fifer 2005, 173, 178), and they are thence conscious of the fact that they need certain necessities met before they can even speak (Trevathan 2005, 191). Pre-programmed to fulfill the necessary appetite they do not, however, understand the need for self-restraint, and it is up to the parents, primarily, and the community, secondarily, to instill the proper virtues into the child in order for them to behave in the way considered 'proper' for their context.

Children born are, contrary to Aurelius Augustine, not selfish little monsters (*Conf.* 1.6.10): they are merely intemperate (*Nic. Eth.* 3.12-3.12.229b; Cp. Bein 2013, 12) and lack social etiquette. By seeking out subsistence and the pleasure principle, i.e., desires which spring initially from simple

⁵⁶ Explicitly stated, human-nature-in-itself is inherently *neutral*, not good or bad, and each person is qualified as *being* good or bad by societal (or meta-ethical) standards regarding the choices made through their unique ontological *cogito* essence to fulfill their self-interest, *not* by their inherent human-nature-in-itself. (See also Han Fei in Littlejohn 2016, 185)

⁵⁷ Special thanks to Dr. Keith Whitfield for pointing out the nature of contingency when discussing the Christian doctrine of original sin in Theology II. Contingency affects all existing beings, and the appetitive nature is therefore a part of animal-ness *a priori*. Cp. Camus: "Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found" (1956, 301)

Let it also be said that humans will do what they have justified is appropriate, and therefore will generally do what they think is good for them (i.e., they are inclined to 'good') at the time.
 Subjective

satisfaction, children are merely seeking out what *all* other animals instinctively seek (Freud 1990, 772; Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 337, 341). The problem, however, is that all which can be desired is not always all that is good, and because consciousness is the house of negation⁵⁸ the child learns what is or is not acceptable as he or she grows up in his or her respective society and modifies their behavior accordingly. Plato's analogy of the city unpacks the idea of behavior modification by showing how children, left alone without the guidance of education, have only their parents to mold themselves by (*Rep.* 549c5-e; 553a5-b5). Plato argues that this mold, while appearing good at first glance, is not always the best option, for when the home is without virtue children develop inharmoniously, and they then have their character shaped by the friends and culture around them. If the friends of the child, and the culture they are thrown into, are not geared towards the task of promoting virtue, the children will all be pulled into different directions by the various experiences around them, and be enticed into fulfilling their instinctual satisfaction using whatever means they get the most pleasure from (*Rep.* 559d5-10e).

As a pleasure-giving action is habituated, desire for the thing practiced becomes hard-wired into the brain (*Rep.* 8.562c5; 8.564a).⁵⁹ As this desire becomes reinforced, the need for 'more' comes with it—more food, more money, more drugs, more *anything*. This 'more' is '*pleonexia*,' which is essentially synonymous with hedonism, is very easy to fall into, and is a foe that all humans must fight because their unbridled desire for more will keep them from living peacefully in a society with other people. This fight against *pleonexia*, however, is not up to each individual to fight alone.⁶⁰ Sarah Adams shows that people, as a human community, are *all* ultimately responsible for each other (2014, 193). Moreover, Lavin argues that only through social action is it possible for a human to "win its own self," and fight against the "institutionalized inauthenticity" which strips each individual away from their own "meaning and identity" (2006, 53, 56, 57). This institutionalized inauthenticity is the culture that forces people to believe that they are what they are not—as a person might say that they *are* a waiter in the sense that a book is a book—and likewise forces its own values on the individual instead of giving each person ample room to find them their-self.⁶¹ Because people must conduct themselves in a way that is most beneficial to the environment, if corporations are getting away with polluting local communities to save *more* money, it is up to *everyone* who is aware to take action and stop the pollution. Moreover, if a corporation or any person at all is responsible for polluting the *minds* of the youth through the propagation of malicious or self-centered living, it is up to *the community* to ensure that the corporation or person-at-hand changes

⁵⁸ Resembling, though not dependent on, Heidegger—great minds think alike, I suppose.

⁵⁹ Cp. Altman 2016, 25; Plantinga Jr 1995, 142; Freud 1990, 772.

⁶⁰ Camus: "We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is to fight them in ourselves and in others" (1956, 301)

⁶¹ Cp. Carl Roger's *Conditions of Worth* theory of personality development (Grison and Gazzaniga 2019, 519)

their message. If culture is shaping children to believe that doing drugs and shooting people is okay, they will grow up to believe that they should be drug users and murderers. When these 'values' become actualized in an individual, it is not, contrary to popular belief (Adams 2014, 192), just the individuals fault that they have become a drug addict or a murderer—it is *everyone's* fault! If a child grows up to commit a terrible act, it is not just the *parent's* fault—it is the *entire culture's* fault! Through this understanding of collective responsibility, one may also find a situation-in-life upon which to apply the two meta-principles found earlier: People are all collectively responsible for each other; moreover, they are also responsible for the things that take place *through* other people *to* the environment. Thus said, people are all collectively responsible for ensuring that their children are raised in a way that they view the world with dignity, see the need to control their appetitive nature, and understand that the earth, with all of her inhabitants, must be taken care of.

Adults still share more in common with their child-like innocence than they believe—the difference is that the consequences are greater. For where a child does not understand that they might die from drinking the chemicals under the sink, so adults do not know if the latest scientific investigation will ultimately yield positive or negative results on a global scale until the experiment is over with. What is more, humanity's scientific strivings, while many times being conducted under the pretense of human flourishing, are tinged with a *pleonexia* which seeks to overcome the natural order: People are not satisfied with letting Nature run its course, so they seek longevity; people need more food to sustain an ever-increasing population, so they genetically modify crops and destroy entire forests for more harvest land.⁶² If this grab for the control of Nature were not enough as it is, people's current scientific possibilities are only hindered by their current amount of study, and their current amount of study is increasing with every passing second. Since humanity's natural *a priori* throwness is that of Being-in-the-world then, as such, it is also, primally, one that is Being-from-Nature. If to be social is to be human (Lavin 2006, 68), and to be human is to possess a limitless ontological futurity, then societies, together, must ponder the possibilities open for human existence. In pondering these possibilities, they must weigh the good with the bad, and because it has been concluded that, *a priori*, 1) People should always conduct themselves in a way that is beneficial to the world; and 2) Human flourishing should be refined in light of environmental health; people must make a communal effort to ensure that scientific investigations do not get out of hand and advance to the point where they are completely neglectful of the state of Nature, which is the realm of humanity's origins, and the heritage they must care for.⁶³

⁶² Many more examples can be given, but these two suffice to make the point.

⁶³ Discussion is a very important part of developing a better world, and is in line with friendship in Aristotle's virtue ethics, which "depends on the relationship between role models and emulators . . . mutually supporting each other's self-cultivation" (Bein 2013, 14). Cp. the conclusions found here with Elizabeth Harris' statement that "in ultimate terms, metaphysical differences are less important than the destruction of self-centredness

One inconspicuous way that people disregard their heritage is by continuing to reproduce their species no matter what cost it bears on the world. In continuing to reproduce, people need more land for houses and more food for consumption. This entails less room for wild-life to exist because people need more space, and increases the rate of fossil-fuel consumption because people need to produce and transport more sustenance.⁶⁴ Weighing these factors, to continue on this earth without some means of population control would be to disregard the two meta-principles found above, and while being responsible in regards to over-population seems at first glance to lead straight-way towards abortive methods or some type of global euthanasia, it *must* be kept in mind that, as seen above, everything existing in the world possesses value *a priori* whether or not one currently realizes it yet, and therefore humans should be treated as valuable members of the valuable world-in-itself, not as brute objects to handle any type of way any other person may desire. Because the next practical principle after responsibility is moderation, what this actually entails is a call for people to curb their passions and practice chastity, which is the most cost-efficient way to keep the human population in check while also holding human life in a dignifiedly-high esteem. When life is started, because existence is valuable, moreover, because every human born has the potential to change the world for the better through their unique contribution to society, every conception deserves a chance on earth because every person brought into the world is both special and valuable. These truths make abortion immoral,⁶⁵ because to destroy one whose existence is valuable is not to act in a way that benefits the world, and helps ensure that every living person is held in high esteem because all things are dignified *a priori* through the very fact of their existence.⁶⁶

Moffett remarks that if humans ever wipe each other out, the world will probably continue to go on without us (2020, 13). One reason for this is that Nature imposes limits onto herself which she does not transgress—if humanity wishes to continue existing as a source of value in the world (Read 1956, vii-x; cp. Guignon and Pereboom 2001, 260), it must incline itself to the environment and take note of what it

and greed. Our cosmos is threatened by personal and corporate greed, selfishness and shortsightedness. More important than discussions about ultimate reality, or whether there can only be one reality, is what we should do about this” (2016, 30-31)

⁶⁴ For a striking account of the problems of unbridled population growth, see Han Fei in Littlejohn (2016, 185-186)

⁶⁵ I believe the only exception to this rule should be for victims of sexual assault who are not willingly impregnated, but this is just my opinion, and ultimately up for that victim to make for themselves. In all other cases, abortion is wrong because it is more than likely the result of, or the way to, a person fulfilling their immediate self-interest without their regard for the far-reaching implications of the decisions they have made on other things in the world.

⁶⁶ Moreover, because an existential ethic relies on people’s freedom, it would do well for readers to now call Beauvoir to mind, when she states that “[I]t must not be forgotten that there is a concrete bond between freedom and existence; to will man free is *to will there to be being*” (2006, 131; emphasis original, underline mine), which likewise calls abortive measures into question.

I.e., if a person is struggling with the idea of abortion because the child will be born into poverty, that person should have thought about this before getting laid. (unless, of course, the poverty is due to some recent, unforeseen, circumstance).

finds. It is very important that humanity does not lose touch with its state of Nature (Freud 1990, 776), and, moreover, it is of utmost importance that they don't forget the fact that their basic constitution is also one which contains the possibility of nihilation. One may say that if human-nature-in-itself is something with limitless ontological projection then people should follow suit with that nature and project themselves to infinity.⁶⁷ This infinite projection, however, is to forsake the salvific reigns of negation, a negation which is also an intrinsic possibility of being human-in-itself because of its manifestation through the transcendent *cogito*, and equates to people being motivated by a state of unbridled *pleonexia* which will ultimately lead humanity into many more problems. Ontological projection guided strictly by *pleonexia* would be an utter disaster for the world, and would eventually end in humanity's own destruction (MacLeod 1999, 326; Cp. Freud 1990, 802). Rather than shooting for the stars in everything they do, people must turn towards the Earth and learn from Nature to find moderative limits to place on themselves which they can enforce by using their negative constitution in a given situation (Camus 1983, 187, 190).

5 Reflections

From the existence of real people in the real world the existence of two metaphysical moral laws was uncovered:

- 1) People should always conduct themselves in a way that is beneficial to the world;
- 2) Any pursuit in human flourishing must always be refined if the same task can also be done in a way that is more beneficial for, or less damaging to, the environment.

After finding these two universal standards, it was then shown how these two meta-principles entail the constitution of two practical principles:

- 1) Responsibility;
- 2) Moderation.

Now, rather than taking the time to dictate a large set of rules and regulations based off of these four principles, I believe the proposition of a few current-day questions are in order to provoke reflective thought as readers have these new principles fresh in their minds because this method will better prove the effectiveness of the principles:⁶⁸ Because no human can exist in space without the use of highly technological equipment, is it natural, and therefore right, for people to begin living in space? Are people striving to go to space in order to promote unbridled human flourishing, or is their pursuit guided by

⁶⁷ An example of infinite projection would be advances towards ends which groups such as transhumanists strive for, which are ends such as human immortality through scientific/technological progress. Progress such as immortality through technology might at first *appear* to be in line with the self-preservation from which the first meta-principle was abstracted; however, because this immortality transgresses Nature's limits, people should learn to accept death (which is another major component of the abstraction) when it comes, rather than flee it.

⁶⁸ Remember, however, Adam's assertion that "even in the best of circumstances, and in spite of our best efforts, the needs of everyone cannot always be met" (2014, 191)

moderation and world responsibility? Is holding a racial prejudice against another person who is a part of the world a dignifying way to view someone who is individually unique? Is one having a sex-change operation respecting the limits of the ontically-unique inheritance (i.e., one's human body) which Mother Nature specially constituted for that irreplaceable person *a priori*? Would curbing one's appetite for flesh and changing their diet to one which relies more heavily on plant-based options help the environment? Is someone facing the choice of abortion because they, or some unexpected diabolical character, chose *pleonexia* rather than being responsible? Would anyone be in any of the difficult choice-situations they currently face if people used their potential for negation guided by care for the world instead? What is stopping humanity from making different choices in matters which are known to lead to so many problems? Answers to these questions will not be proposed because the answers are not black-and-white; moreover, any possible responses given here will only be from the author's own limited perspective. Questions such as these are for each individual to face for themselves, yet to be dialogued about with the people in that individual's society—this paper only offers the propositions in order to provoke reader's thoughts for dialogue in their respective communities.⁶⁹ However, as the Dalai Lama noted that certain governmental systems do not ultimately work because they are not founded upon love (Kornfield 1993, 108), it is recommend that you, reader, answer these questions in a way that makes room for love for yourself, which would involve you being honest to yourself even if it hurts; love for your neighbor, which would involve you putting them above yourself if need be; and love for your world, which would involve you treating Mother Earth the way that you would wish to be treated if you were in her place—the planet's very future may depend on it.

6 Filling the Gap

Sartre's stress on subjectivity has created substantial hurdles for the existential ethic (Braddock 2006, 92). For Sartre, everything which people experience is ultimately a matter which each individual must interpret for themselves (2000, 294-295), and hence there is "always a large and unbridgeable gap

⁶⁹ MacLaren's final footnote in her essay on Merleau-Ponty's 'Embodied Ethic' bears repeating, as her words *radiate* with the spirit that it existential, community dialogue:

"Ethical people would, as I have said, embody an insight into the human condition. They would live in a way that acknowledged their implication in, and responsibility to, others. They would work to promote the freedom and creative self-realization of others. Where disagreements arose, they would operate with the assumption that the other is disagreeing not out of stupidity or a denial of what is right and moral, but because the other lives in a situation involving different imperatives than their own. Thus, instead of simply, and moralistically, insisting on their own point of view, ethical people would, we would expect, take up this difference in perspectives as a call for self-reflection and better self-knowledge. In the light of this difference in perspectives, they would be moved to question themselves honestly concerning whether they need to change their own lives, to come to perceive in a way that does justice to what the other sees in his or her self and the world. They would also hold others responsible for their own self-reflection, soliciting them to become people better able to recognize others and themselves. Ethical people would thus strive in their everyday lives for mutual recognition and solicit such a striving in those around them" (2006, 165-166)

between the contents of [moral] imperatives and our choices” (Braddock 2006, 97). Because of this gap, existentialists have wrestled with the fact that moral principles which are “too abstract” are insufficient to guide one to make proper decisions (Braddock 2006, 97-98), and have hence failed to establish a widely agreed upon standard for moral conduct. However, if one were to always conduct themselves in a way that is beneficial to the world, they obviously have a sufficient principle to help them decide whether or not to recycle. If a person is told that human flourishing must always be refined in a way that is conducive to a healthy ecosystem, they have sufficient grounds for choosing whether to invest their money into solar power or fossil fuels once they review the data. If faced with the situation of choosing to drive drunk or call an Über driver and one were told to make the ‘responsible’ choice, there is only one choice of the two left for that person to make. People who negate their *pleonexia* will not rape, murder, or steal, and if Sartre’s student (2001, 296-297) lived in a world where people imposed their own moderative limits on themselves, this young man would be free to go home to his mother because those who abide by moderation have no need for war, which utterly destroys everything in its path and thus forsakes the first meta-principle.⁷⁰

It is up to humanity to save the world, but how is this to happen?⁷¹ You, reader, may be saying to yourself, ‘I am just one person, how can I make a difference?’ That is a good question, one which leads *many* to feelings of insignificance, and one which I am very glad you asked: History shows us time and time again that if just *one* individual follows their heart in pursuit of a noble cause the only limits which cannot be surpassed are solely those of his or her own will-power. Socrates liberated the minds of the Athenian youth at the cost of his own life. Martin Luther King Jr. faced imprisonment, and peacefully withstood physical abuse to stand up for the equality of his people. Joan of Arc’s inspiration caused her to lead an entire army at the age of seventeen. Booker T. Washington’s tenacity took him from sleeping under sidewalks to building a school whose legacy still stands over one-hundred years later, and Jesus’ crucifixion conquered the entire Roman Empire. You, reader, are a unique individual, like the great people just mentioned above, whose unique contribution—one in which *no other* can take your place—can make a world of difference. If you see a turnpike where people conveniently throw trash out of their car window, what is stopping you from cleaning it up?⁷² Because human existence is *a priori* valuable, why not start a food-drive in your local community to help the less fortunate around you get a taste of

⁷⁰ Moreover, keeping with the dilemma of the student, he may now have a guiding factor by asking himself whether going to war and fighting against what he sees as an oppressive foe and an unnecessary-evil-in-the-world or going home to his mother to care for her is best for the world at large, and from thence make the ‘proper’ decision.

⁷¹ Special thanks to Mr. Robert Lee for pointing out the need for positive practical examples.

⁷² In taking time out of your day to voluntarily care for the world, or, by extension, for any existent beings which are alive *in* the world (thus expanding your own narrow self-interest to involve concern for others as well), you would be fulfilling your duty towards the first meta-principle, and hence become ‘virtuous.’

responsible human flourishing?⁷³ Get your children involved in your efforts, teach them first-hand the meaning of responsibility and, as you conduct yourself with them-in-the-world-with-you, perhaps you will run into situations where the need for moderation will arise, and you can act in a way that sticks with them for a life time.^{74, 75}

It has been well argued that because of humanity's freedom they also have the potential to create (Camus 1983, 95 et. al.); moreover, that, existing alongside one another, human solidarity is a means to keep people pressing forward through all of life's hardships to a yet underdetermined end (Camus 1983, 120). Thus said, it is up to each of us, as individuals, to create a better world for tomorrow because we are all in this world together. Each one of us is a culminating totality which represents the past, from antiquity to now (Holiday and Hanselman 2016, 170), is heading incessantly towards the future, wherein all of our current actions will find their results, and is in the perpetual embrace of the present, in which all events are forever being unified in experience. You, reader, may feel as though you are just one person out of a billion, floating in a tide of your own obscurity with absolutely no purpose; however, as we have seen, *you*, as a unique-human-[b]eing-in-the-world, have been bestowed with a *very* important inheritance, which is the world-in-itself. If you choose to say 'no' to any current circumstances which are damaging existence, and hence strive for a better world, you do so not only for yourself, but for everything else that has *ever* existed in the world at any time whatsoever. In this way, you make a contribution which no one else can make, an impact which no one else can erase, and you take a stand, carrying the entire world on your shoulders, which may inspire countless individuals to follow in your steps. The future is yours to create, what are you waiting for?⁷⁶

7 Conclusion

The existential ethic system argued for above has been abstracted from three self-evident points of existence—the *cogito* (that is, one's personal, perceiving epicenter), the world, and death—which are intimately experienced by each person subjectively, and are universally experienced by all people in a way that makes them objective. The objectivity of these three points makes the existential imperatives available to all individuals, while their subjectivity as experienced uniquely by each person makes them applicable to all human experience. This existential ethic transcends cultural relativism because all

⁷³ This can also be a call to 'big-businesses' to curb their appetite for more capital and redistribute their wealth to those in need. A call to redistribution of wealth, however, does not necessitate a social-/commun-ist framework, but places the responsibility of using profits to help others into the hands of those running said businesses.

⁷⁴ "[E]xistentialist thinkers preach by example" (Daigle 2006, 169)

⁷⁵ Cp. Marcus Aurelius' recollection of his elders building his noble character through experience (*Meditations* 1.1 ff.). However, bear in mind that your responsibility is not solely towards humans—plants and animals need care too.

⁷⁶ "Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present" (Camus 1956, 304)

humans share, and depend on, the same world. It fulfills existentialism's foundational requirements because its base principles are derived *a priori* from real people's real situation in the concrete world (Sherover 1981, 233), it offers its practical principles in a way that gives one enough flexibility to fit into their own situation-in-life (Sherover 1981, 235), and satisfactorily guides people's filling-the-gap by providing universal principles that can direct one's actions because they are not too ambiguous (Braddock 2006, 97, 102). It is one which underscores the responsibility and uniqueness of all people as individuals (Sherover 1981, 234), and consummates itself in the necessary phenomenon of 'being-with' (Ibid., 233), while also recognizing each individual's specific historicity, authenticity, and action (Ibid., 235) rising out of the "incarnate consciousness that is born in proximity to others *and* radical distinction from them" (Adams 2014, 189; original emphasis).

The biggest problem for enacting the existential meta-ethic in the real world on a large-scale will be stopping global-market companies, bought-and-paid-for politicians, and beg-tech who, egged on by a society which has long ago forsaken its limits, selfishly wreak havoc on the environment to fill their pockets. Moreover, the looming threat of totalitarianism will inevitably raise its ugly head and attempt to strip humanity from its freedom as the multitudes try to unify under a common cause.⁷⁷ However, last but not least, the major problem upon which the two above problems rest is, sadly, people. People, while such a major component to existence, will be the main reason why the existential ethic will not work on a grand-scale, and will keep it forever shackled to the realm of academia and small-scale subjective circumstances unless it is harness for global subjugation.⁷⁸ As long as people's freedom is exalted, their self-interested, mindlessly self-indulgent behavior which arises from basic human-nature will majorily push them to do what they feel is best for *themselves* on a small-scale at any given time, and will majorily draw them to the instant gratification which leads one to hedonism rather than the prolonged gratification that leads to results on a large-scale.⁷⁹ An existentialist cannot afford to live in a false reality which believes that people are inherently good or prone to virtue,⁸⁰ and once one comes face to face with this truth, that individual must then search for their own reason to live existentially-virtuous-in-the-world by walking in accord with this meta-ethic even though the odds are so heavily stacked against them in regards to affecting positive-change-in-the-world.

Indeed, this paper has given individuals four principles which are proper for guiding one's conduct-in-the-world; however, even though the 'how' has just been answered for everyone, it is up to

⁷⁷ Those who do not see the threat of global tyranny hiding beneath the surface of a call to universal virtue need to wake up.

⁷⁸ A subjugation which *must* be avoided at all costs.

⁷⁹ Cp. Alinsky 1971, 54ff. This is what 'Saint-Just' could not see, which resulted in his silence (Camus 1956, 129). This small-scaled hedonism/large-scale result distinction is influenced by a book titled 'Mastering the Addicted Brain,' which I no longer have with me to properly cite.

⁸⁰ See Alinsky 1971, 13-14; cp. Alinsky 1968, 64.

each individual to find *their own* 'why.' This 'why' is one's motivational force that causes them to act, and it is this 'why' which can never be objectified. Readers may believe that this meta-ethic is built off of world-preservation, and thence claim that world-preservation is the 'why.' However, world-preservation is a guiding abstraction that helps produce the 'how' in a given situation, and while it is philosophically expedient and objectively true,⁸¹ objective truths do not maintain motivational longevity in the human mind as well as subjective ones do, and are not guaranteed to emotionally affect everyone who hears them—an emotional affect that is needed to bring forth real-world-action from an individual.⁸² Therefore, if one seeks to live according to these meta-principles, they must do so for their own reasons which, ironically, is a self-interested inspiration for being interested in the Greater Good. Moreover, it paints me to say since so much positive writing took place above, each person who chooses to act existentially-virtuous must bear in mind that they may be doing so for absolutely *nothing* except the satisfaction which arises from the fulfillment of their own inclination. The reason that virtuous living carries the possibility of being for nothing other than one's own inclinative fulfillment is because the virtuous person is only one individual actively striving for a better world among so many others who claim to be, and who believe they are, consciously working for the Greater Good, but who are blindly living in a small-scale, self-interested way that is subtly conducive to the contrary.⁸³ Of utmost certainty, each person-in-the-world who is striving for existential-virtue must realize that way too many others are generally unconscious of the true nature of their actions, and are synonymously, therefore, sleep walking. It is the mass of sleep walkers who are actively destroying the world without truly knowing the extent of their actions that are the problem-people mentioned above, and it is the sleep walkers that are the virtuous person's greatest obstacle to enacting large-scale change. This obstacle, however, is not one that is overcome with hate or hostility,⁸⁴ but one which is vanquished by the virtuous mind stepping out of its own comfort zone and seeking to wake the sleeping with compassion-driven education and a life lived by example.⁸⁵ Thus said, not only is the imperative to educate found in the existential-ethic, it is even a

⁸¹ And, moreover, although it may be *some* people's 'why.'

⁸² Some may think that this need for an individual's own 'why' undermines the meta-principles. However, this is only so if one fails to see that this current 'why' under discussion (let us say, the 'little why') is motivational, and thus not the same 'Why' which is used to guide the ethical choice. For instance, one needs to separate their garbage *because* recycling is good for the planet (the 'Why' of guided choice); however, they may not 'feel' like taking the time to sort through their garbage *because* they do not care enough about the planet to inconvenience themselves (the 'why' of motivation)

⁸³ This statement, too, may seem like it is contradictory to what was said above, but it is not. For while just one person *can* make a difference (as argued above), an existential-person in-touch with the world-as-it-is must always bear in mind that nothing in this world is guaranteed (save for, apparently, death), and thus their actions may not produce the results they are looking for outside of themselves.

⁸⁴ As in the totalitarian regimes.

⁸⁵ There is a little bird that suggests waking these people is a bad idea (Kornfield 1993, 229-230). I believe, though, that Francis de Osuna (2016, 8:20) and M. Aurelius (*Med.* 6.42) should be consulted here instead.

fundamental tenet found in reality arising necessarily as a constituent of Being because it is conducive to a better world all-together. However, just because 'The Great Awakening' is needed does not make it possible. For people (remember, self-interested *a priori* beings) who do not *want* to be awakened; moreover, people who do not think they *need* this awakening, will fight each herald's every beckon-call to the bitter end, taking all of humanity with them to the very depths of an earthly hell as they follow only what is right according to the dictates of their own selfish minds in pursuing their desires to the detriment of us all. Because the existentialist is now aware of their task to teach, and, moreover, because they are likewise now aware of the obstacles they face through other people, yet another imperative comes to the forefront, which leads to yet another, that has the utmost of importance: keep the awakened from justifying the scaffold against those who sleep (see Camus 1956, 121-132), and keep the Orwellian Nightmare from consuming us all.

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