

# *Labyrinth*

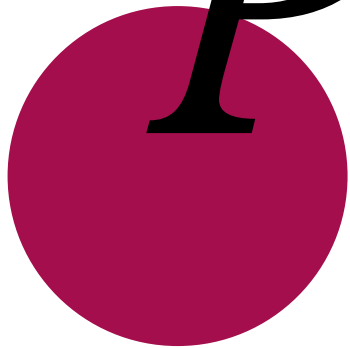
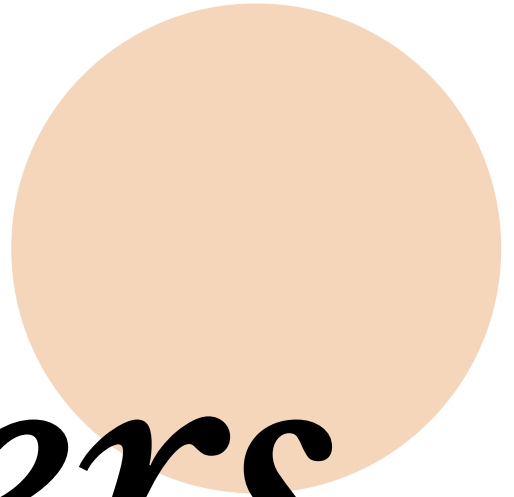
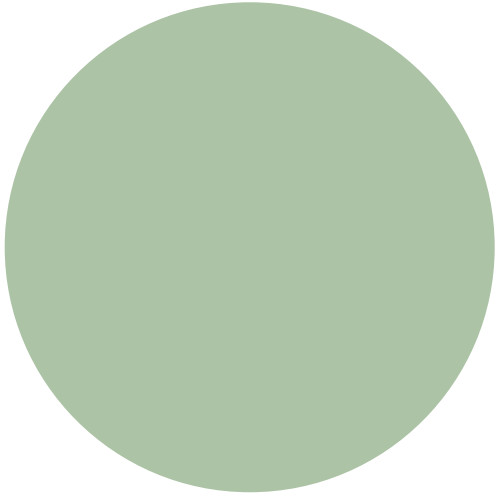


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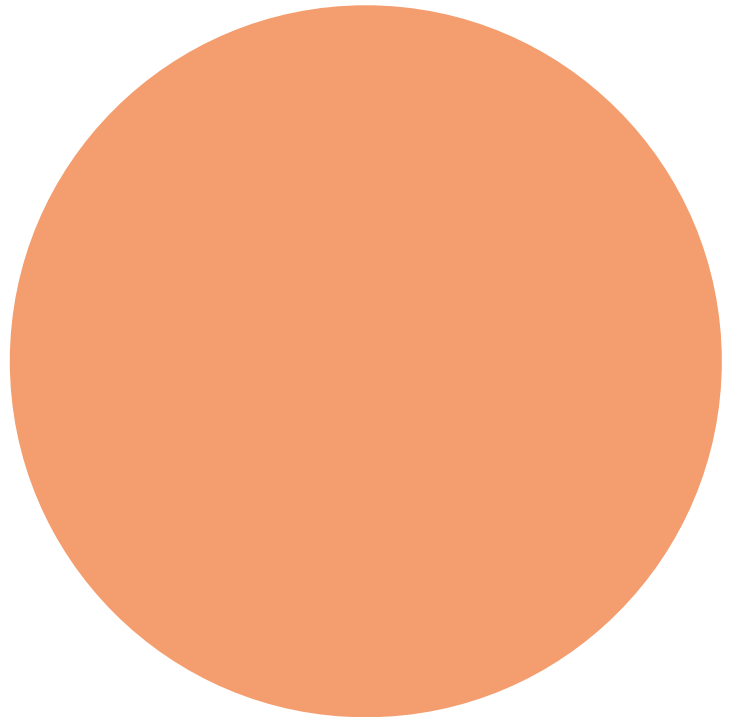
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# *Papers*



# **Why Physicalism is a Theory Worthy of Pursuit in Application to Consciousness**

## **Cade Eshelman, University of Iowa**

### **I. Introduction**

In the piece *What is it Like to be a Bat?* Thomas Nagel argues against the use of physical reductionism in the pursuit of understanding consciousness. Physical reductionism is the theory or practice of reducing complex phenomena to simple physical states. In the context of this paper. Physical reductionism claims that mental states are reducible to physical states of the mind. Nagel tries to refute this. The concept of objective versus subjective mental phenomena is used in the argument as the crux of our inability to understand consciousness, subjective experience being something impossible to make objective. Nagel provides the suggestion that more work towards understanding objectivity and subjectivity is the proper course of action, stating that it may be realistic to use physical reductionism in the future once our understanding of this concept is more robust. Nagel does not seem directly opposed to the use of reductionism applied to consciousness, only against use of reductionism until we understand subjectivity sufficiently to apply reductionism to consciousness. Furthering this point Nagel states, “At the present time the status of physicalism is similar to that which the hypothesis that matter is energy would have had if uttered by a pre-Socratic philosopher” (Nagel, 447). We cannot measure its truth and we do not know how to speak of the issue in a reductive manner. I will address this take on subjective experience and its bearing on understanding consciousness and why it contradicts physicalism less than is suggested by Nagel.

### **II. Nagel’s Argument**

There is subjectivity between individuals which arises from experiences having subjective features. Nagel introduces the idea of a blind person having different experiences than someone that

is not blind. A bat's understanding of what it is to be a bat is different from a human's understanding of being a bat. These types of differences are present from human to human, which seems only to be a consequence of our diverse experiences acquired. A human will not have common experience with another human or bat just as a bat will not have common experience with a human or another bat, this really seems like an axiomatic trait of conscious individuals. From Nagel's point of view, this subjective experience is what makes it impossible for us to reduce consciousness, as the subjective qualities of experience are only enhanced as they are reduced; so, while reduction often leads to information that is more objective, it only leads to more subjectivity in the case of consciousness. While Nagel makes these claims, he is reluctant to make any statement directly opposing physical theory of the mind and instead opts to focus on our issue of subjective versus objective. I agree with Nagel that the issue of subjective versus objective should be considered before some concepts may be studied successfully but I do not believe this is justification for a halt in use of physical theory of the mind.

Nagel argues that the subjective character of experience is not fully captured in the use of reductive methods. We may analyze the mental reductively, but the subjectivity of experience is lost in this analysis. He then claims behavior and its relation to the mental may not be analyzed with the subjective for the same reason. He admits that conscious state affects behavior or that they may be given characterizations, but this analysis means little because the subjective character of experience is left out, and when a part of what is being reduced is left out in reduction, the overall reduction is "falsely posed". Due to our lack of knowledge on consciousness, we cannot possibly include it in our theory or study of the mental through reduction, making reducing the mental fruitless because of this piece that is left out. I acknowledge our lack of knowledge of consciousness, and inability to directly address it, but it seems that through indirect addressing of consciousness, we have grounds

for reductive work in the area. Nagel admits directly that conscious states likely influence behavior and functional workings of the mind. So, I believe we may study behavior and the functional workings of the mind to indirectly study consciousness reductively.

### **III. My Response**

To reductively analyze the consciousness, we can examine Psychiatric conditions often triggered by experiences that are known to have physical bearing on the neurology of an individual. Patients with Dissociative Identity Disorder or DID experience a different development in the mind than is usual, this is often due to trauma. The only known cause of DID is severe ongoing childhood trauma. This trauma is an experience which affects development of the brain directly, which then affects the behavior of the individual. This is one example of functional characterization in the mind affecting behavior. I would suggest that all experiences have a similar effect on minds that are similar, functionally changing the mind to respond to different things in different ways, and cases like DID prove that our minds have common developmental responses to certain experiences, and when this response is different, it is because the brain was developed differently prior to the experience. I may not enjoy certain things that someone else does, but there are things I may experience that may allow me to enjoy those things; the sensations felt by someone else are not felt by another because they are developed differently prior to this sensation. This prior development does not mean the brain cannot be changed, as there are common experiences that may cause someone to enjoy something. If all experiences have specific effects on the mind depending on the prior experience of the mind, then studying the mind is less of a dive into the subjective like Nagel suggests, and more of a dive into the effects of certain experiences on people's behavior and

functional mental characteristics regarding what they have experienced prior. It seems there is an expected response to any experience for any person if enough is known about that person's prior experience, the difficulty lies in the vast number of experiences conscious beings take in, so, experience seems objective, people are only subjective because we have different objective experiences. An analogy to better explain this concept: Two individuals are getting vaccinated; one has a fear of needles, and one does not. No quality of the experience changes, it is the same act only upon different recipients. Experience holds a quality of objectivity as it does not change depending on the individual, it is only that the individual receives the experience differently depending on prior experience. Perhaps one fears needles because of an unpleasant experience in their past. Subjectivity is common in every recipient of an experience; I offer the cause of this subjectivity is more a quality of the recipient than a characteristic of experience.

Nagel argues that we lack theoretical background to understand physicalism and that our pursuit of the theory now is fruitless because of our lack of background. He suggests we cannot yet understand how a mental operation responds to a physical one. Nagel even suggests it is possible we simply may be unequipped to understand the concept altogether. I will quickly counter that the example of insect metamorphosis may be applied to any scientific discovery and that much of our evidence may be part of something we are unequipped to understand.

On insect metamorphosis: Suppose a caterpillar is locked in a sterile safe by someone unfamiliar with insect metamorphosis, and weeks later the safe is reopened, revealing a butterfly. If the person knows that the safe has been shut the whole time, he has reason to believe that the butterfly is or was once the caterpillar, without having any idea how such a change may have occurred. In relation to science: People make discoveries with little idea of how the discovery works, we draw conclusions before we have the premises.

As we can see clearly, this does not mean we cannot benefit from pursuing science. He

moves then to say that little work has been done on the objectivity of experience, and that until we can understand if there are even objective qualities, we cannot make a hypothesis regarding their physical nature, but it seems to me that if inductive reasoning is passable in science that we can at least make a hypothesis regarding physicalism.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

If pre-Socratic philosophers theorized that matter is energy, they had little way of proving this, but pursued this theory and rightly so. Matter has been studied, reduced, and found to be energy, and while the philosopher may have had the wrong way of getting there, existence of the theory provides grounds for its pursuit. Great scientific discoveries throughout history have been met with controversy, and the roots of these discoveries are often in theory that is distant from objective truth, but the objective over time is approached. Theory in science is not always correct, new theories can be expected to change as we gather more evidence. It is stated by Nagel that little work has been done on experiences having objective character, it is not that this lack of present work should convince us away from theory of physicalism, rather theory of physicalism should convince us to work in this area. Had the pre-Socratic philosopher shied from theorizing on a concept that was not understood, theoretically, we would have had less grounds for work on matter. The existence of theory provides us with a motive to work until theory is proven false, and physicalism has not been proven false.

While Nagel raises good points about what we should be focusing on, I do not believe he provides sufficient reason not to pursue the theory of physicalism. His view on subjective experience assigns the quality of subjectivity to experience where I see it instead as a quality of an individual. If we view experience as something complex and objective, there is no reason not to continue working with physicalism until evidence points us in another direction or another theory becomes more



convincing. Lack of understanding in an area is no reason not to attempt understanding that area, if we truly are clueless to the concept of the mental then we should not discount any method of study in the area; Nagel's suggestion of expanding work on the objective versus subjective is very agreeable, as there is, at this point, no reason not to. *What is it Like to be a Bat* raises good points about how we could approach the conscious but is not convincing in its attempt to discourage use of the theory of physicalism.

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## **A Universal Egalitarian Distributive Justice Principle Resulting in Varying Normative Political Action**

**Daniel Fu, University of Iowa**

Mohist impartial caring and Rawls's *Original Position* came from two very different societies separated by more than two thousand years, but they are largely similar in their egalitarian viewpoint that recognizes the arbitrary nature of existence<sup>1</sup> and prescribes action based on these views. However, the political actions prescribed by these similar viewpoints differ greatly. Mohist impartial caring results in the necessity of universal love (*jian'ai* 兼愛), which makes it imperative to maximize benefits within society; the normative political action prescribed was to maximize benefits for the maximal amount of people, resulting in a state consequentialist ethic. In contrast, John Rawls formulated his theory of justice as a rebuttal to consequentialism, suggesting that difference in distribution within a society is allowed to be different given that such differences maximize the position of those worst-off within society; in this way, it would be possible to account for individual rights, which consequentialist thinking lacks. While the conclusions from these initially egalitarian points of view greatly differ in prescribed action, I believe that such differences are not indicative of a difference in their principle of egalitarian distributive justice. In this paper, I will argue that Mohist universal love and Rawls's difference principle are contextual differences between the same understanding of the arbitrary nature of existence leading to a universal egalitarian distributive justice principle, which suggests that the context behind each philosopher greatly influenced their normative political action. The failures of these philosophers to result in an egalitarian society are not due to their normative political actions, but rather shortcomings in egalitarianism itself as a practical answer to distributive justice within a society.

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<sup>1</sup> The arbitrary nature of existence arises from an inability to differentiate a true intrinsic cause as to personal differences. For example, socioeconomic status is a great determinant of future education level, but the socioeconomic status that one is raised in is arbitrary. No one chooses to be born into specific circumstances. I find that many personal characteristics follow under this category, ranging from social influences to the biology that impacts how we perceive the world.

Mohism originates from Mozi, who lived during the Hundred Schools of Thought period of the Warring States period in ancient China. His beliefs were largely aimed at the maximization of benefits as well as equal distribution of benefits, in which benefits are defined as social welfare, social order, and increased population. This consequentialist belief was to be implemented at the societal level (state consequentialism) to promote benefits for the societal unit as a whole rather than as an individual means of living. This strong belief led to the rejection of many crucial elements of other Chinese schools of thought, such as rituals and music, which were usually implemented to provide for individual moral cultivation. Rather, the Mohist belief focused solely on benefit as value, resulting in the requirement for the promotion of benefit as an ethic. Essential to this belief is the Mohist concept of impartial care, which sought individuals to reject partiality and approach all individuals impartially, and Universal Love, which prescribes actions directed toward recognition of the intrinsic value of humans; only through rejecting impartiality would benefit be maximally promoted.

More than two thousand years later, political philosopher John Rawls wrote *A Theory of Justice*, aimed at determining a proper standard of distributive justice within a society. To do so, he synthesized principles of liberty and equality that he believed were sufficient in resulting in a just society. Crucial to Rawlsian justice is the idea that “justice as fairness”, suggesting that standards of distribution within a society must be understood as fair to individuals, in which no individuals are given an advantage over others; only through justice as fairness would authority be able to retain legitimacy. He proposes three principles of justice (liberty, alternative distribution, and equal opportunity) to achieve “justice as fairness” and claimed that these principles of distributive justice are those that individuals in the *Original Position* would hold to create an ideal just society (Wenar). The *Original Position* is a state of being in which individuals are behind a “veil of ignorance” and are unknowing of the sociopolitical positions that they hold in society. In this *Original Position*, the

individual would be forced to reason that justice would have to be fair due to the arbitrary nature of identity<sup>2</sup>. This results in the three principles of justice: maximize liberty, allow differences within the social status of those in society provided that the worst off have their benefits maximized (alternative distribution) and equal opportunity for all.

Mohist impartial care and Rawls's *Original Position* both endorse a viewpoint that individual characteristics are largely arbitrary. From this understanding of the arbitrary nature of existence, an egalitarian understanding of distributive justice arose. Mozi suggested that partial care among others would eventually lead to the detriment of society, and therefore it would be necessary to impartially care for those around us. Mozi wrote:

“It is things such as great states attacking small states, great families wreaking havoc with lesser families, the strong robbing the weak, the many doing violence to the few, the clever deceiving the ignorant, and the noble acting arrogantly toward the humble. These are some of the great harms being done in the world... We must recognize that they [origin of harms] come from hating and stealing from people ... so it is those who are partial in their dealings with others who are the real cause of all the great harms in the world” (Impartial Caring, chapter 16).

Key to this thinking is the concept that partiality leads to harm. As individuals are partial for the benefit of themselves and those that they are partial to, this results in harm to others. However, Mozi finds no distinction amongst individuals that justifies the partial treatment of others; regardless of one's social status or obligation to one's family, there is no reason to commit partial acts if such acts lead to harm. As such, all that is partial (such as the family unit prescribed by the Confucian

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<sup>2</sup> Justice is a key tenet of any functional society, as it recognizes how we ought to act within a society, measuring the needs of the self against the rights of others. The justice that is prescribed by Rawls is dependent on recognizing that many key identifying characteristics that have implications in society are actually not dependent on the individual, but must be considered to be arbitrary. Therefore, in a societal context, it is necessary to ignore such arbitrary characteristics to have a fair society, where individuals are not judged based on characteristics that they do not have control over. This results in the phrase “justice as fairness”.

role ethic) can be understood as arbitrary and lacking in normative basis. Mozi prescribes an egalitarian distributive justice principle because he does not see any partial distinction that is not arbitrary. Similarly, Rawls argued that the nature of our identity is irrelevant once placed behind a “veil of ignorance” to achieve the *Original Position*, and so our attitudes toward distributive justice ought to consider the fact that individual characteristics that are used as identifiers are arbitrary and ought not to hold any weight. When explaining the *Original Position*, he wrote, “no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like” (Rawls); there are further distinctions as to what individuals in the *Original Position* know and do not know about their identities, however, they are largely irrelevant to this discussion. Identification based on characteristics is to be ignored in the *Original Position* as we largely do not control these individual arbitrary characteristics in the veil of ignorance, resulting in a conceptualization of justice that emphasizes egalitarianism and the equality of individuals. Again, we see that personal characteristics that distinctions are typically made of are seen to be arbitrary, resulting in the belief in egalitarian distributive justice.

Further similarities between these two points of view come from their conceptualizations of political authority and where such authority is derived from. Under Mohism, human nature is thought to be that of profit as aided by an individual’s sentimental desire for profit. Mohist belief suggested that benevolent rulers were those who maintained impartiality and promoted benefits for their subjects; Mozi states, “even though one may not advocate impartiality, one would certainly want to follow the ruler who is impartial” (Impartial Caring, chapter 16). Here, it is argued that all individuals (provided that they are not fools) will be persuaded by such impartiality. This is because they would benefit from an impartial ruler, appealing to their sentimental judgments of the justice imposed by the ruler. Likewise, John Rawls argued that legitimate authority is largely dependent on

an agreement between those within a society and political authority. He conceptualized reasonable members (rational individuals) who could agree to the principles of authority, making it a legitimate authority. As long as coercive institutions maintain their agreement with the reasonable members of society, they can be considered legitimate authority (Christiano). In both of these cases, political authority and power are largely derived from the approval of the individuals in a society, although differing in the origin of the approval. Towards the end of this paper, I will use these two concepts to discuss the shortcomings of the egalitarian distributive justice principle.

Despite the shared egalitarian distributive principle held by Mozi and Rawls, there are obvious differences between the Mohist and Rawlsian distributive justice that arise through the normative political actions between Mohist universal love and Rawls's principle of difference. These two ideologies have prescribed differing actions to result in a just society that properly distributes resources. The differences are largely due to their descriptive contexts that greatly influenced the philosophers that espoused such ideals. Key to this descriptive context is a component of game theory known as Belief in Zero-Sum Game (BZSG). BZSG is a "general belief about the antagonistic nature of social relations based on an implicit assumption of limited resources" and is largely dependent on the concept of zero-sum, suggesting that there is no net gain or loss within a society (Różycka-Tran). As such, the gains of an individual in society must be equivalent to the losses of another individual in society, to result in the net sum of zero.

The effects of a zero-sum mindset (or BZSG) can be seen throughout the majority of human history. The economic output of most ancient and early human societies was dependent on agriculture, which is limited by the amount of land each societal unit possesses. Societies were zero-sum, and so one's economic output due to larger control over the land meant that others in the area would have a smaller economic output due to the lack of control over the land; note that this is an over-simplistic view of early agricultural societies, but it serves well to demonstrate the mindset held

by these early agricultural societies. Under this mindset, most societies turned to territorial conflicts to expand their land, which would in turn maximize their economic output at the expense of those who lost their land. During these times, individuals did not have to imagine what the future was going to look like; they already knew that their lives would largely be static and that their future generations would likely live similar lives. It was not expected that there would be an increase in economic productivity, and other than natural disasters, sicknesses, variations in feudal lords, or any other unforeseen event, individuals during this time could largely expect to live in a stagnant society.

Ancient China during the Warring States period was largely controlled by this mindset, as territorial lords sought to expand their power and influence over the land for the sake of prosperity. Individuals in ancient China came to realize that benefits could only come at the expense of others. While some schools of thought resulted in a hierarchal order based on one's role (the Confucian role ethic) to ensure that those around them were taken care of, Mohism took such distinctions on which partiality was dependent to be arbitrary. As such, the Mohists did not advocate for partial action and did not see any practical reason for political action that prescribed such partiality. Rather, Mozi advocated for universal love as a normative political action to demonstrate impartial care. In this period, any partial actions would have to promote the self at the expense of others, and so Mozi suggested that a state consequentialist normative political action as universal love could be used as a means so that all individuals would benefit. Note that it is impossible for such societies to continuously benefit, as they were still in a zero-sum world. However, this minimized the potential losses that could arise in partial societies and was the best standard by which egalitarianism could be achieved in zero-sum societies.

Human societies greatly changed during the Industrial Revolution, allowing for the development of positive-sum societies. Before this period, productivity could be maximized, but the Industrial Revolution allowed for an increase in total production output. Economic growth became



possible as innovations increased the potential for productivity, resulting in the mindset that economic growth was to be expected. As such, individuals during this time have come to expect growth and innovation. In our current state, we do not know what the future will look like since we expect there to be so much change that our societies will be unrecognizable; the only thing that we do know is that our future societies will not stay the same and resemble the present. Under such a mindset, Rawls allowed for an unequal distribution of wealth as an incentive for greater productivity while maximizing the positions of the lowest within a society to maintain the egalitarian standard of the *Original Position* (this maximization is absolute rather than relative to the rest of the society); this is because the profit of one individual does not mean that other individuals have to lose, as everyone can benefit. This positive-sum mindset allowed individuals to benefit more than others, provided that others still received the maximum benefit possible due to their arbitrary nature of existence. Furthermore, each individual (in a positive-sum society) that is allowed to innovate has the potential to further increase the productivity of our society, resulting in the principle of equal opportunity. This way, he accounted for egalitarianism, economic growth, individual rights, and the maximization of potential growth through his theory of justice.

What we see between these two ideas are the same principles of distributive justice based on arbitrary distinctions of individual identity resulting in differing normative political action due to the context under which each philosopher rationalized a proper standard for achieving such distributive justice. This egalitarian distributive justice has been a fixture in societies throughout human history but has never been successfully implemented at a large scale over a large number of people. This is not the fault of the normative political actions that have been prescribed to achieve this egalitarian basis. Rather, there are a few fundamental issues that must be resolved before the implementation of this egalitarian distributive justice principle. First, how is authority to exist as a political power over individuals and coerce individuals to follow the principles of egalitarian distributive justice? The

authority to implement an egalitarian distributive justice principle is antithetical to egalitarianism itself. There are ways of getting around this issue, such as the Mohist social hierarchy and Rawls's principle of difference, but these conceptions are dependent on a perfectly egalitarian and rational power to act as the political authority within a society to implement such egalitarianism in the society. As we can imagine and see in real life, no such political authorities exist.

Next is the issue of how authority can gain the approval of society through egalitarian distributive justice. There are two conceptions of this: Mohist's sentimental approval of benefits and Rawls's agreement with reasonable members of society. Mohism uses the sentimental approval of individuals within society as a standard for determining the benevolence of the ruler, contingent on the assumption that human nature is that which seeks profit. However, there are issues in maintaining such an egalitarian system, as individuals would realize that profit could be maximized through egoistic ways of thinking. Mozi thinks from a broad scale as to proper distributive justice, but he errors in thinking that all individuals will adopt and maintain his egalitarian principle of impartial care as in reality, they will all eventually turn to egoist principles that are more favorable to their benefit. Rawls, on the other hand, suggests that coercive institutions can gain legitimacy through agreement with pure rational members of society. Such individuals in a society do not exist and he fails to understand that any egalitarian principle must appeal to the sentiments of the masses to gain their approval.

Although any egalitarian distributive justice principle must deal with the issue of deriving the approval of the sentiments of the masses, I do believe that such a society can exist. Small-scale egalitarian societies have existed in the past and thrived. However, this seems to be largely due to the social learning of the individuals in the society, who then adopt such egalitarian views with a sentimental basis. This is dependent on the development of social virtues which are those that are largely internalized by those within society. Practically, modern-day society may not be able to

achieve this standard. I do not see a way by which egalitarian principles can be taught to the masses or an economic system that will allow for such education to occur.

It is also interesting to think that for much of early human history, societies were largely communitarian, and for the promotion of the group; many people lived and died for conceptions of nationality and religion while seemingly being lost from history as being largely irrelevant to notable human history. In modern society, societies are largely capitalistic and emphasize the value of growth; the capital must be exchanged, innovations in science and technology must occur, and we all must spend what we earn on materialistic concerns to promote and prop up our entire system, as justice is found in the transfer of monetary value. It seems that at no time in human history has the promotion of the human experience been emphasized as the goal of a large-scale society. As such, it is also worth questioning whether or not we actually *ought* to have this egalitarian standard of distributive justice. While suggesting that all individuals are to be treated equally regardless of the arbitrary characteristics that they possess sounds like a great idea, it is impractical and seemingly antithetical to any kind of hierarchal political system. That is not the purpose of this paper as I have sought out the reasons as to why normative political actions have differed despite an identical recognition of the arbitrary nature of existence, but that seems to be the next logical consideration following this paper.

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Daniel is a rising senior at the University of Iowa majoring in Biomedical Sciences and minoring in Philosophy. His philosophical interests lay in metaethics, normative ethics, political philosophy, and ideas that impact the subjective experience. He credits the development of his social and political worldview to having studied philosophy. In his post-grad career, he hopes to promote human value by fighting against neurological and mental disorders and prolonging existence in this world.

# Fregean Sense and Reference Regarding Personal Names and Gender

K.C. Knowlton, Southern Utah University

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Abstract*

Frege's account of sense and reference, and how senses and references are employed in language, explains many of the problems we encounter in linguistic communications— specifically in regard to identity statements. In this paper, I will be exploring how Frege's account of sense and reference applies to the relation between personal names, gender, and identity. I will be arguing in this paper that gender is a part of the Fregean sense that is attached to a personal name. In doing this, I will be examining the relationships between name, gender, and identity within individual, varied cases and showing how the various interpretations of gender in these cases are consistent with the Fregean category of sense. It is worth noting that the interpretation I utilize in this argument is a non-standard interpretation of Fregean sense, which I will more thoroughly explain later in my account.

In an effort to more thoroughly examining the connections of these aspects of meaning and identity, I will focus primarily on cases in which the relationship between self, gender, and name is more complex than cisgender individuals whose given names correctly convey their attributed gender. Specifically, I will be focused on cases of transgender and genderqueer identities in order to fully examine the complexity and problems of sense and reference regarding vocative interaction and gender, as well as the ways in which we seek to resolve the linguistic problems that arise from these complexities.

### *1.2 Frege's Account of Sense and Reference*

An understanding of Frege's account of sense and reference is essential to understanding this paper. Frege's account of sense and reference is primarily an attempt to explain how informative identity statements are possible. The statement "Hesperus is Phosphorus" is perplexing because Hesperus and Phosphorus are referentially synonymous (they both refer to the planet Venus), but the statement still seems to convey new information. This is the problem Frege is attempting to explain

in his account of sense and reference. Frege's account of reference is fairly straightforward: the referent of a name is simply the thing to which the name refers. The sense however is more complicated. Frege describes sense as being a 'mode of presentation'. In the case of Hesperus and Phosphorus, the name Hesperus expresses the sense of "evening star" while designating the planet Venus while Phosphorus expresses Venus through the mode of presentation as the "morning star". Therefore the informative aspect of this statement comes from the differing senses rather than the reference of the names. Frege's definition of sense being a mode of presentation does leave some ambiguity and room for interpretation but will function sufficiently for my argument as I am less concerned with identity statements and the associated truth values than with the function of sense and reference in vocative language.

An important clarification of Frege's account is that he suggests that there is a specific order and function of the different connections between names, senses, and referents, "to the sign there corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite referent, while to a given referent (an object) there does not belong only a single sign." (Frege 211). From this, we are to understand, and Frege goes on to further clarify, that sense is primarily attached to a name rather than to a referent. Furthermore, the connections which do exist between sign, sense, and referent are exact relationships; each sign corresponds to exactly one sense, each sense to exactly one referent. This does not apply in the reverse however. A single referent can have multiple associated senses and/or signs that correspond to it. This clarification will be important for my argument as I discuss the functions and significance of personal names and personal name *changes*.

### *1.3 Non-Standard Interpretation*

As acknowledged, my argument in this paper will be utilizing a somewhat nontraditional interpretation of Frege's account. While in agreement with Frege's portrayal of sense and reference, the more focused nature of my argument in dealing exclusively with the relations between people, personal names, and gender identity, necessitates some additional considerations. Because my argument is interested in the application of Fregean sense to individuals which are aware and cognizant and often have their own specific desires regarding the sense (especially regarding gender) which is applied to them, we must account for an additional language user which Frege is unconcerned with.

By this, I mean that Frege's account treats communicative acts as occurring between two

actors: the conveyor and receiver. The narrowed focus of my account, however, requires that we acknowledge the referent as a sort of third actor in these communicative acts. This is not in conflict with Frege's account, but helps to explain why my account will treat communicative acts as occurring between a conveyor, a receiver, *and* the referent as well as my concern with the referent of a name in respect to their desires, gender identity, preferred personal names, etc. This concern further introduces an ethical consideration which I am interested in defending which is not necessary to Frege's account. If we are to treat the referent as involved and affected by communications which involve them as a subject then we are obligated to consider them in how we evaluate communications.

Furthermore, having made clear my intentions for this argument, it should be apparent that I am much less concerned with the truth values of statements than Frege's original account. In order to even begin to evaluate the truth values of the statements that this paper is concerned with we would be required to establish a metaphysical account of gender, its mutability, how it is designated to an individual, etc. My interpretation of Frege will instead focus on the ways in which we utilize and understand gendered names and pronouns in regular language.

#### *1.4 Terms*

Besides an understanding of Frege's account of sense and reference, this paper will also require an understanding of several terms which, while not especially uncommon, are oftentimes confined to queer spaces and discussions of queer sociology, philosophy, etc., and therefore may be unfamiliar to some.

##### *Deadname:*

**1** *n.* : a birthname or other former and no longer used name of a transgender or nonbinary individual which generally conveys a gender which does not correspond to the individual's current gender identity. **2** *v.* : to use an individual's deadname (usually without their consent). Deadnaming is considered to be disrespectful and can be a form of misgendering.

##### *Genderqueer or Nonbinary:*

**1** *adj.* : a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman. **2** *adj.* : an umbrella term for many gender non-conforming or non-binary

identities (e.g., agender, bigender, genderfluid). (The Safe Zone Project)

*Misgender:*

**1** *v.* : “to refer to someone using a word, especially a pronoun or form of address, which does not correctly reflect their gender. This may be unintentional and without ill intent or can be a maliciously employed expression of bias.” (PFLAG)

*Transgender:*

**1** *adj.* : “a gender description for someone who has transitioned (or is transitioning) from living as one gender to another. **2** *adj.* : an umbrella term for anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond in the expected way (e.g., someone who was assigned male at birth, but does not identify as a man).” (The Safe Zone Project)

The specific distinctions in meaning between transgender, genderqueer, and nonbinary are not especially important in the context of this paper, but each of these terms will occur and should be understood to be essentially referring to a gender identity that is not the same as the gender assigned to an individual at birth based on their birth sex. Deadnames, deadnaming, and instances of misgendering are of specific concern to my argument because of their referential nature.

## **2. Gender is Fregean Sense**

It seems fairly intuitive that gender is often interpreted to be part of the meaning of a name. Websites providing suggestions for baby names sort their suggestions by boy’s names and girl’s names and any hypothetical person referred to by the name John tends to be interpreted as being masculine while Emmas tend to be interpreted as feminine. This is not to say that all personal names convey gender as part of their given meaning; gender-neutral names are a fairly common exception where gender can not always be interpreted from the name alone, without context or referent, but I maintain that gender, when it is able to be interpreted from a name, is part of the meaning that is attached to a name.

It is not immediately clear, however, that gender is not some aspect of meaning independent of sense. A further examination of what constitutes sense and how this is applicable to our use of



gender in language and an examination of the structure of the relationships between individuals, gender identities, and names will provide support for the interpretation that gender is attributable to Fregean sense.

### *2.1 Gender as a Mode of Presentation*

The idea that gender is often taken to be part of the meaning of a personal name seems to be fairly straightforward. However, the question then arises, what is it that makes gender part of the Fregean sense of a name rather than being primarily attributable to some other theory of meaning? This is best illustrated in two parts, the first being a simple interpretation of the definitions of both sense and gender and an argument for their compatibility, and the second which will be an in-depth examination of some of the more complex relations between names, gender, and personal identity and simultaneous analysis of how these relationships demonstrate Frege's account of sense and reference.

Frege defines sense as being a mode of presentation. While certainly a contested claim, it does not seem radical to suggest that gender likewise functions primarily as a mode of presentation. By this, I am not attempting to make any claims about the actual metaphysics of gender or the ontological validity of nonbinary, transgender, or even cisgender identities that present themselves in any variety of ways. While I wholeheartedly support discourse on these adjacent subjects, I am interested here in the way gender functions as an aspect of language. Gendered pronouns, names that convey a specific gender, and other such markers in language do not necessarily inform ontological reality, but rather convey the perceptions of the social beings who participate in utilizing the language. Therefore, my claim is not that gender itself is the effect of presentation, but rather that the function of gender in language is as an aspect of social perception that is informed by various presentations. Our classification of individuals based on identity aspects such as gender serves to help us predict, interpret, and evaluate the behaviors of others (Mallon 1). Linguistically, names, pronouns, and other language that attributes gender to an individual generally gives us an idea of what to expect from that individual such as the way they might look or the behaviors they might exhibit.

It is not uncommon to hear, often in the context of transgender identities, of an individual "presenting" themselves as more masculine/feminine/androgynous and it follows that gender presentation and consequent gender perception is adjacent to how gender functions in language in

that it is at least, in part, socially and linguistically constructed from the way that we present ourselves or are perceived by others. Likewise, there are many aspects of gender that seem to be performative in the sense that our decisions to participate or not participate in traditionally gender-coded activities, dress standards, interests, etc. seem to alter the way in which gender is to be attributed to a person. Intentional or not, we frequently allow the names, pronouns, and other linguistic indicators of gender to shape our expectations of a referent. This often leads us to attribute a gendered sense to an individual before even interacting with the actual referent. If a friend were to tell me about their coworker 'Jason', there is already a set of male-coded attributes that I am likely to expect of them thereby attributing gender as a part of the sense of 'Jason' without the context of the referent who may meet or contradict those expectations.

In examining how gender as sense functions in language, it should be acknowledged that this necessitates some degree of mutability. As much as our actions, participation in performative gender, visual presentation, and other outward indications of gender are mutable, we are committed to the idea that linguistic gender can also be changeable and fluid. Examples of this fluidity might be found in gender fluid individuals, whose gender identity and presentation might change frequently while transgender identities might represent a more permanent change in presentation, linguistically attributable gender, and gender identity.

The purpose of these examples is not to create unnecessary complexity in evaluating the relationship between name, gender, and individual, but rather to illustrate the necessary connection between name, sense, and referent in that the sense (discernable gender) of a name is an intermediary step between the name and the referent. Sense is applied before a reference is attributable and therefore we cause linguistic complexities by using names which apply to a referent but which convey a sense which is in conflict with that individual's current presentation.

## *2.2 The Name, Sense, Referent Relationship*

In order to fully convey gender, we often attribute differing names to differing modes of presentation. By this, I am referring to the fairly regular occurrence among transgender individuals of assigning a different name to themselves that matches their current gender identity rather than the name that they were given at birth which matches the gender that they were assigned at birth. This practice of attempting to attribute a different gender, or to un-assign the gender designation that is conveyed by an individual's birth name conveys the relationship between Fregean sense and names.

While both an individual's birth name and their new name refer to the same person, they have differing gendered senses which shape how others perceive that individual in terms of gender. In the case of reassigning a name to an individual in order to reassign the gender that is attached to the referent, we see the specific order of sense being primarily attached to a sign or name rather than to a referent.

In the case of transgender individuals, the common conception might be of a single instance of change which, while being significant for identity statements and picking out the referent, does not imply the same mutability of names and senses applied to a referent as the classic Hesperus/Phosphorus example. The consideration of gender fluid identities shows an example in which gender identity, presentation, and attributable gendered language might change more frequently. This phenomenon can even be exhibited in cisgender individuals such as a cisgender man who performs in drag and goes by a feminine name and she/her pronouns while performing in drag and presenting femininely but goes by a masculine name and he/him pronouns the rest of the time. To refer to a man by the feminine name which they use while performing drag would seem incorrect although the referent would still be the same person because the gender which we attribute as sense to the name would not be compatible with the man's current presentation.

To expand on the topic of gender conveyance through names, especially as it applies to transgender identities, we should discuss the problem of deadnames. Beyond being considered disrespectful and invalidating, using a person's deadname becomes linguistically complex in the context of gender as Fregean sense. A deadname still picks out a referent, and even picks out the correct referent. If we are to accept that a name does nothing more than designate a referent, it should be straightforwardly correct that an individual's current and dead names be synonymous. This is the point at which we can see some of the failings of direct reference theory regarding personal names. If picking out a specific object is the sole purpose of a name, then it should not be problematic to use any specific name which refers to the specific referent which one desires to refer to. If we exclude Fregean sense from our understanding of meaning, it becomes unclear why there would be any complications in referring to a woman as "Jason". However, due to the gender that may be conveyed by names and deadnames, this becomes more complicated. To designate a transgender man by a feminine dead name or a nonbinary person by a deadname that is distinctly masculine or feminine conveys a sense of gender that is in conflict with the identity of the referent.

This conveyed gender sense is more than just a validation of an individual's identity, it is a linguistic convenience as well. Attached to gendered names are gendered pronouns. While

presumptive, it is not unusual that we consider it unproblematic to have associations between names such as “John” and he/him pronouns or other such associated pairings between gendered pronouns and gendered names, but when these names and pronouns designate referents who don’t seem to match the sense being conveyed by the name or pronouns they are designated by, it becomes difficult to use language effectively.

This does to a degree depend on the assumption that gender is a mode of presentation that clearly conveys what gender can be attributed to a person or whether gender is attributable to a person at all. Due to the complexities of personal gender identity and other factors that contribute to an individual’s presentation of themselves, this may not always be the case. Nonetheless, while language tends to convey the perceptions of the speaker, precision and correct usage which may be misled by perception is occurrent and persisting.

### *2.3 How We (Already) Attribute Gender to Fregean Sense*

All of this is not to say that Gender constitutes the entirety of the Fregean sense of a personal name. There are clearly other elements, ones that are distinctive and essential or defining besides gender which might be conveyed in the Fregean sense of a name. To suggest that the name ‘Aristotle’ conveys the sense of being a man is not technically incorrect, but it seems more probable that we would passively attribute masculinity to the name in whatever the more complete sense of Aristotle may be. For example, the sense of Aristotle as ‘the man who studied under Plato and wrote *Metaphysics*’ seems probable as a potential sense of the name, and while studying under Plato and writing *Metaphysics* may be the more distinctive attributes that we recognize in this sense, we also convey that he is ‘the man’ who did these things thereby attributing a gender to him in a passive way that would not seem to be out of place in regular use of the English language.

Certainly, there are situations in which it may seem strange to stipulate that Aristotle was ‘the man’ who did these things. In other languages that may rely less on gendered pronouns or have less care for designating the gender of an individual in general, it may seem more out of place to include Aristotle’s maleness as part of the sense of his name. I will freely admit that this account of gender as part of Fregean sense may not be applicable in every language or society which places more or less emphasis on gender; Fregean sense of a name is something that is “grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs” (Frege 210) and as I can only claim to be sufficiently familiar with the English language to

grasp the senses of proper names through the use of that language, I will not pretend that this is a universal rule. But within the context of the currently-used English language, gender is oftentimes passively a part of the more thorough sense which is conveyed by a proper name.

### 3. Objections

I expect that there is the potential for some opposition to my interpretation of gender as Fregean sense from two main sources; those who may object to Frege's account of sense and reference to begin with, and those who may object to my interpretation of gender.

#### *3.1 Objections to the Fregean Account and My Interpretation*

Objections to the Fregean account which I utilize in my arguments I will handle briefly. There is plenty to be said when it comes to objections to Frege's account of sense and reference and I would like to point out that some of the essential points in my argument are adjacent to some of these objections. One main objection to Frege's account is that we can construct sentences which convey seemingly contradictory things about a single referent by utilizing different names attached to different senses. The problem of deadnames that I discuss in my argument seems to be adjacent to this objection to Frege's account in that, although gender is fluid at least insofar as its function in language is concerned, different names for the same referent may convey seemingly conflicting senses. In the case of dead names, we may stipulate that "A" is a man's name and that A (designating the referent) is not a man. These two statements seem inherently at odds with each other and may seem to exhibit some of the complications of Frege's account. Despite these complexities, Frege's account is effective at reconciling seemingly contradictory statements with the truth values of those statements. If we were to utilize a direct reference theory in this same example, we would be straightforwardly contradictory in claiming that "A" as a sign identifies a man and that "A" in a specific instance is a woman. With the further understanding offered by Frege's account we can further understand the functions of names, the cognitive significance of gender that we attach to personal names, and the concerns which follow. Frege's account of sense and reference does not *solve* these complexities, but rather *explains* why this problem can occur.

It is not generally contested within the philosophical community that misleading and

seemingly untrue language does occur with some degree of frequency and that so long as billions of individuals continue to utilize it for their own purposes, these linguistic occurrences will continue. I accept that gender and personal names give rise to challenging questions and that this account of gender being Fregean sense does little to address the metaphysical and truth-value concerns of statements involving these complex gender identities.

In this paper, I do not understand Frege to be making claims as to how we should best communicate. Frege is attempting, in “Sense and Reference”, to give an account of why informative identity statements are possible. He is not attempting to construct an informative identity statement in the interest of proving their existence, the existence of such statements is rather intuitive. When one says “Hesperus is Phosphorus”, we understand that there is an informative aspect of this statement. Frege is concerned instead with explaining *why* Hesperus and Phosphorus can be referentially synonymous while still seeming to convey new information. I am interpreting Frege’s account of sense and reference as being one which does not and does not claim to resolve linguistic complications and miscommunications, but rather explains their occurrence. Frege is not making a case for how language could be better utilized through the use of sense and reference, rather he is applying sense and reference as explanatory factors to language as it is already used.

### *3.2 Gender Objections*

The other aspect of my argument which I expect may incite some objection is my interpretation of gender as being a mode of presentation. American society, as I currently experience it, tends to frequently understand gender as being nearly synonymous and interchangeable with biological sex. While I have objections to this on a metaphysical level as well, I am not concerned with the actual ontological reality of gender in this paper. I am concerned with the function of gender in language. Language is not shaped exclusively by ontological reality, but rather merely by the perceptions of the speakers and writers who employ language.

To refer to a passing transgender man by feminine pronouns or a feminine name puts one’s language in conflict with the perceptions of both the speaker as well as the person to whom they are communicating and has the potential to hinder effective communication. Regardless of arguments about the nature of gender, adopting or forsaking a gendered name tends to alter the sense that one is perceived with. Names convey gender and can be utilized as a mode of presentation as such

regardless of whether there are more metaphysical requirements for actually being that gender or not.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The objective of this paper has been to examine some of the complexities that gender and personal names introduce to vocative language— specifically in the case of transgender identities which often intentionally reconstruct the language surrounding their referent to correctly convey the gender identity (or lack thereof) which they wish to attribute to themselves. I explain these complex relations between name, gender, and identity by using Frege’s account of sense and reference. My examination of Frege’s account of sense and reference includes an interpretation of his definition of sense being “a mode of presentation” which explains the compatibility of this definition with gender as it functions linguistically. Furthermore, I examine some of the issues that surround gendered names and gender identities as well as the ways in which we seek to solve those issues such as reassigning names to convey reassigned gender and the adjacent issue of deadnames which are referring but convey an incorrect sense. I recognize that this paper does not discuss the topic of metaphysical gender identity which may be considered to be adjacent to this discussion, but is exclusively concerned with the linguistic function of gender in vocative speech and therefore does not address what may be potential objections to my interpretation on a metaphysical level, although these topics may warrant further discussion.

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**Schematic Interfaces and Social Expectations**  
**Brianna Larson, University of Nebraska - Omaha**

Think of a time when you were in a social setting and observed something troubling about another person's behavior; when someone outside of your social group interacted with you in a way that seemed *off*. In this instance, you were presumably being discriminated against due to some immutable characteristic (race, status, gender, ethnicity, etc.). Perhaps you were able to hone in on specific phrases, shifts in body language, slight changes in tone of voice, or other concerning social and verbal cues, yet when you tried to articulate what you were experiencing to your friends, they did not seem to understand. In short, you had an adverse reaction to something unnoticed by those around you. The salient behavior was perceived only by you, and not until the offender's behavior became more overt did others finally understand. Why might this be the case? In instances like these, I argue we are utilizing a unique, schematic mechanism shaped by experience to make inferences about people's behavior. This mechanism functions in a markedly different way than humans might otherwise pass judgment on or observe the behavior of others. Use of this schematic mechanism happens over time as an ongoing activity whereas judgment is passed quickly and intermittently.

We encounter a similar scenario in Amia Srinivasan's paper *Radical Externalism*. She argues against epistemic internalism by using realistic examples of individuals experiencing oppression fueled by bad ideology, or "pervasively false beliefs [that] have the function of sustaining, and are sustained by, systems of social oppression".<sup>12</sup> One example used in her paper is RACIST DINNER TABLE, in which Nour, an Arab woman, is invited to her white friend's

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<sup>1</sup> Srinivasan 2020, pg. 15

<sup>2</sup> Epistemic internalists hold that a belief is justified if their justification is accessible, available, internal, etc. to them.

dinner party. After the party she infers that her friend's father is racist. Upon immediate reflection she finds she cannot remember any specific instances of racism; when pressed for an explanation she claims she *just knows*. Her belief turns out to be correct; "[the host] did send off subtle cues that Nour subconsciously registered and processed. It is this subconscious sensitivity that led to her belief that her host is racist".<sup>3</sup>

Srinivasan comes to two conclusions in RACIST DINNER TABLE: (1) Nour is epistemically justified and (2) Nour does not have access to her subconscious racism-detection mechanism. My concern lies with conclusion two. The claim that Nour does not have access to her mechanism rests upon the assumption that because she cannot verbalize what she is experiencing, she must not be experiencing it. This is a mistake. I will offer an alternative account of the nature of Nour's mechanism, which I will call a Schematic Interface (SI).

For the remainder of this paper I will use *mechanism*, schematic interface, and *SI* interchangeably; they should be understood as the same thing. Schematic is chosen to signify that the mechanism is used for classification; it provides a foundation for understanding one's social interactions. Interface is chosen to signify that the mechanism is interactive, a translator, and a tool that encourages us to reason about our social interactions. The SI operates as a tool for information integration and is formed heuristically, or through self-discovery and hands-on learning. Since it is formed through individual experience, not everyone uses this mechanism in the same way or to the same extent. In the following section, I will offer an account of how she has access to her SI, albeit not in the sense that one might typically think of access. Next I will explore the social and personal implications of the SI.

## I. *Radical Externalism* and The Argument Against Access

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<sup>3</sup> Srinivasan 2020, pg. 2

Srinivasan argues that Nour is epistemically justified in believing that her host is racist, even at the time when she is unable to articulate her reasons for this belief. A critic of this view might contend that Nour was simply lucky, and stumbled into a true belief that later was proven true by further evidence. Srinivasan disagrees and posits that it is by a dependable reliability rather than a stroke of luck that Nour is right. Here, I partially agree: she is not lucky – the inference that her friend's father is racist is not merely guesswork. She further suggests that Nour does not have access to her internal detection mechanism. Under a reliabilist framework, lack of cognitive access to the belief-forming process is acceptable. The statement against access, however, is wrong. If we ask Nour for a self-report too soon, before she has time to deeply reflect, we will not know whether she has access to her SI. We likely did ask Nour too soon. Therefore, we do not know whether she has access. One may wonder when the *right* time to ask Nour is. I suggest there is not one *right time* to ask someone for their justification. At the moment Nour was asked, she did appear to be lucky. This was an appearance – it was not a reflection of what was actually happening. Nour was actively processing stimuli that were only partially accessible to her. I do not think this qualifies as luck.

Nour's proposed lack of access bodes well for Srinivasan's position on externalism. The conclusion that she does not have access, however, was reached too quickly. Viewing access as both dichotomous (either had or not had) and something that must be verbalized removes the possibility for partial access, which is something I take Nour to have.<sup>4</sup> Nour is obtaining information, both consciously and unconsciously, from her sensory experience. The interface must work to classify, integrate, and organize that information. This happens over time. What Nour and individuals in positions like hers are experiencing is an *ongoing activity* of

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<sup>4</sup> I'm referring here to Ned Block's idea of access consciousness. In his framework, access consciousness is available for report, action, and reasoning. I suggest in other work that his standards for reportability might be too stringent. Instead, we should view consciousness as something graded rather than dichotomous. I use this idea in combination with Bernard Baars' Global Workspace Theory to suggest that individuals similar to Nour may have some content that's partially lit, therefore partially accessible. As a rudimentary level, this is what I mean by *partial access*.

information processing and reasoning.

Nour's catalog of experiences with oppression allows her to judge the present to come to dependable conclusions. I suspect that the level of awareness she has of her SI's function is dependent on the stage of development. The following outlines a four-step process in which this development seems to be happening.

1. Nour experiences an instance of oppression for the first time (racism, classism, xenophobia, et cetera).
2. She both consciously and unconsciously retains information from this experience.
3. Nour experiences another instance of oppression, but this time she is able to categorize the behavior as such. In this stage, she may be unable to say precisely how or why she comes to the conclusions she does. Most of the information is likely unconsciously processed.
4. Nour realizes that her previous experiences with oppression are responsible for her *just knowing* that her host is racist. In this stage she is able to report and give reasoning for the how and why. Most of the information can be accessed consciously. Information integration either from experience directly to consciousness or from the nonconscious processing of experience to conscious awareness seems to happen more rapidly at this stage.<sup>5</sup>

With every discriminatory or oppressive experience Nour has, she logs this behavior, allowing her to recall these instances for future comparison of similar experiences.<sup>6</sup> It is not that Nour is unaware of her SI's function, but rather that she is partially aware of its presence while nevertheless unable to elaborate on exactly what it does and how. With more time, she and others in positions like hers would be able to identify their SI.

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<sup>5</sup> In Baars' Global Workspace Theory, information integration happens quite quickly; my theory varies in the amount of time it takes for information to be broadcast. Additionally, my theory *allows* for partial access.

<sup>6</sup> Logging of behavior doesn't need to happen consciously; sensory information that she is not consciously attending to can be perceived at a level that does not constitute full conscious awareness. I don't take this to mean that she cannot be impacted by this behavior. Nonconscious processing in masked Stroop tasks is just one example of this among many. (Schutter and van Honk 2004)

## II. The Schematic Interface's Function and Social Implications

We have established that the use of one's SI is an *activity*. One may come to understand how it functions by looking at muscle memory or procedural memory. For example, consider a frequently shared core memory: how to ride a bike. When a child learns how to ride a bike they are commonly met with fear or uncertainty. The number of things that one needs to attend to when first trying to ride a bike can be overwhelming. How fast should I go? How do I turn? Where are the brakes at? After a few minutes of trial and error, the fear subsides, and they generally forget about their fear notwithstanding a few falls and scrapes that cause minor setbacks. The child leaves the situation likely feeling excited or proud of their new skill. However important these feelings may be, I want to focus on a key component of riding a bike: the commitment of the action to memory. With enough practice the action will become second nature thanks to repetition and procedural memory. Eventually, the child will be able to hop on a bike and ride without thinking twice about how it works or running through the questions mentioned above. Once this is accomplished, the memory of how to ride a bike is not likely to be forgotten.

Other examples similar to this could be given, like shooting a free throw, tying one's shoes, or putting one's hair into a ponytail. The shared trait in all of these examples is that, after successfully learning how to perform these actions, one may automatically recall them at a moment's notice. The SI operates in the same fashion – it must be worked to develop strength and skill, and eventually, its functioning will become second nature. Although one can practice and build their level of skill in any of these actions, we may still make mistakes. The same threat of error can be found in the SI. Below I will give a brief example of a group of friends who appear to have strong interfaces but suffer a grim lack of foresight.

Picture an individual in an abusive relationship, let's call them Ava.<sup>7</sup> Ava's partner, Miles, is perceived well by the public. He has friends who enjoy his company, coworkers who respect him, and a good reputation in social circles. Based on other peoples' testimony, Miles seems like an upstanding guy. Behind closed doors, however, Ava experiences emotional and physical abuse. She develops mixed feelings about Miles. She sees how much their mutual friends love him and, for what it's worth, he *does* apologize after inflicting harm. He often blames his temper or one too many drinks with his friends; she considers this an acceptable excuse after some convincing on Miles' part. Despite his excuses, she still feels unsure in her judgment and confides in a group of mutual, non-male friends. The group comes to find that all of them had experienced some level of inappropriate and/or oppressive behavior from Miles.

Despite having what each of them considered to be reliable SIs, they all suffered some level of malfunction. Ava, in particular, seems to have a *damaged* or partially dormant SI. Being removed, even temporarily, from environments that are either complacent with or reinforce bad ideology is key. How do we prevent this? For Ava and her friends, entering a sub-group to talk about their experience brought a new perspective. The ability to talk through their circumstances and process them in an environment *mostly* free from bad ideology allows individuals to deconstruct their relationships for critical analysis.<sup>8</sup> This will allow them to better understand their situations and improve their ability to rely on their SIs outside of impromptu social groups.

The example of Ava and Miles is meant to show that individuals who have strong SIs may suffer mistakes in their judgments about the behavior or intention of others. The ability to confidently use the SI is impacted directly by one's environment. For instance, the change in Ava born out of the conversation with her friends is necessary but not sufficient for providing her

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<sup>7</sup> Srinivasan offers a similar example of a woman named Radha in her paper.

<sup>8</sup> I don't think it's possible to completely remove the influence of bad ideology, especially when the influences of it (patriarchal standards, for instance) are embedded in the fabric of some social environments.

with a consistently reliable SI. If she comes to these realizations and then goes back to Miles, she will likely fall back into old patterns of belief. A shift to an environment free from bad ideology would be ideal but may not be realistic. A compromise must be reached. I offer that this compromise should look something like the individual removing themselves from social groups infected by bad ideology insofar as it is possible for them to do so. This may not entirely remove the external influence of bad ideology, but it should allow them to strengthen or repair their SIs. With these considerations in mind let us shift gears and examine our expectations for ourselves and others.

The example of Ava and Miles, while basic, is fairly relatable.<sup>9</sup> The aftereffects of experiencing abuse or repetitive oppressive behaviors from a person close to you can be quite severe. Additionally, they can impact the way one believes, thinks, and views the world. One example of this is hypervigilance. Individuals who have experienced trauma may become hypervigilant as a response, making them believe actions perceived to be similar to that of their abuser will lead to future harm. This may not always be the case, and thus a line must be drawn between being hypervigilant and critical. Ava and their friends need not assume that all men will treat them poorly. However, honing in on problematic behaviors and analyzing them will hopefully allow them to detect red flags before they transform into harmful actions.

Another proposed difference between being critical and hypervigilant may rest on the level of physiological response. After suffering trauma, an individual may suffer flashbacks, anxiety, distrust, or codependency. Hypervigilance or other types of trauma responses may cause erratic responses to otherwise non-oppressive, typical behavior.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, due to cultural

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<sup>9</sup> The United Nations states, “Globally, an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older).” (UN Women, 2021)

<sup>10</sup> This implies that experiencing oppression changes an individual both mentally and physically; I take this to be true to a certain extent.

and social norms, what is deemed to be morally unjust in one circle may be acceptable or even encouraged in another. In this way, we may have discrepancies regarding what is acceptable and what we may deem as oppressive or unjust. How should we respond to behaviors that appear to us as oppressive or having bad intentions?

For minor infractions, one should use their best judgment based on previous experience and imagine that they may, in fact, be wrong. Embracing mistakes not as an inherently *bad* thing but as a learning tool can help shift our perspective and allow us to be kinder to ourselves and others. We should also expect that social norms are subject to change. Accepting that our perception of what is socially normative may be outdated or skewed by personal bias can help give us the perspective we need to hold more compassion and patience with ourselves and others.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we looked at the function of the schematic interface. This mechanism allows us to meaningfully categorize and process important sensory information; namely, information about our social lives. The SI is heuristic and built through experience. In this way it is something that most, if not all, of us have. This phenomenon was also highlighted in Srinivasan's work. From her example, I offered that we should not assume that lack of verbal report means lack of access or experience. This is too rigid of an expectation. Instead, we should acknowledge that the operation of the SI is an ongoing activity through which inferences about the behavior(s) of others are drawn. If my theory is correct, it generates quite a few questions regarding how we live and act socially. Can a dormant interface be activated in a way that renders it totally unreliable? Are we born with it or is it totally, socially constructed?



The purpose of this paper was not to suggest that human judgement about oppressive behaviors from individuals, institutions, or society at large is unerring. Instead, I encourage the reader to explore the ways in which their own SIs function. What previous experience(s) have you had that were crucial in shaping your SI? Do you think those experiences tell you something special about the way the world works? Additionally, I encourage the reader to analyze their relationships with themselves, others, and social norms in their communities. I presume the outcome of this reflection will be slightly different for everyone. Keeping in mind that an SI, whether your own or another's, may be faulty can help birth more compassionate, understanding relationships and communities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thank you to Dr. Joseph McCaffrey and Dr. Laura Grams for the invaluable feedback and guidance on this project over the last year. I would like to extend additional gratitude to Dr. Carrie E. Swanson, Dr. Diane Jeske, and Dr. Richard Fumerton for their commentary on my presentation during the Fall 2021 University of Iowa Undergraduate Colloquium. Finally, thank you to the University of Iowa's Philosophy Club for making both the colloquium and Labyrinth possible.

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Bri is a senior at the University of Nebraska - Omaha majoring in Philosophy with a concentration in Ethics, Law, and Social-Political Philosophy and a minor in Human Rights. Recently she's been interested in the philosophy of mind, moral psychology, and self-knowledge. When they are not in class, they are a research partner at an Omaha nonprofit that focuses on social justice and anti-oppression.

**Ulric Neisser's Self-Knowledge: From Constitution to Transduction**  
**Aidan Manaligod, University of Iowa**

Ulric Neisser (1988) asserts that there are five different sets of “self-specifying information” that provide their knower with information about their own existence, and each of the “Five kinds of self-knowledge” changes and develops throughout that person’s own lifespan. The five categories he presents are so distinct from one another that, while they are typically not experienced as such, each constitutes a particular self that happens to act upon the same locus as the other four selves do. Neisser’s argument is inductive, using empirical evidence in the form of psychological research findings to divide the selves on the basis of their differing activities (pp. 35-36). I will argue here that the five selves Neisser defines are not separate selves like he claims they are. Instead, each person has one self that derives its epistemological form from the transduction of self-knowledge through five non-constitutive channels. Each one of the five channels is connected to at least one other by one human ability or more, thus casting doubt on the claim that the five channels constitute the self, and on the claim that the five channels are, in essence, completely separate from one another.

I will first offer my modified, descriptive account of Neisser’s epistemological framework. The first point I will argue is that Neisser’s so-called selves describe the channel that transduces or generates self-knowledge from its respective set of abilities, not separate entities cohabitating within a single person. From this point onward, I will refer to Neisser’s five distinct selves as channels. Psychologically, one or more of the five channels must be in use when self-specifying information moves from the non-self to the self. Each channel contains a set of abilities, each of which can be traced to some property of the human mind and body. Because humans are unique in mind and body, the efficacy of any ability may vary between individuals. These abilities may have numerous explanations, ranging from the biological structure of the human mind to a deeper metaphysical cause for their existence such as God, but as a matter of scope limitation those explanations will not be explored here.

I will first allow the spirit of Neisser’s five channels to remain unmodified and will attempt to work within the parameters of his original definitions. The ecological channel harnesses self-knowledge from the

physical environment and the human body's placement therein (Neisser, 1988, pp. 37-41). The interpersonal channel harnesses self-knowledge from social interactions with other humans; Neisser emphasizes the "intersubjectivity" of those interactions, which generally requires the consciously mutual coherence of communicated information with respect to time, affect, nonverbal cues, and so forth (pp. 41-46). The extended channel harnesses self-knowledge from "personal memories and anticipations" as evidence of the self's persistence throughout time (Neisser, 1988, p. 36). The private channel's self-knowledge derives from a person's awareness that they are withholding some information from others who could perceive or learn that information, but nonetheless do not due to the withholder's volition or forgetfulness (Neisser, 1988, p. 50); whether that is done intentionally or unintentionally does not alter what the private channel is able to accomplish for its user. Finally, the conceptual channel generates self-knowledge in the form of social roles or personal traits by assigning self-identifying belief systems to a pertinent subset of a person's total knowledge, subjectively qualifying that subset as self-knowledge (Neisser, 1988, pp. 52-54).

Each of these five channels requires a set of loosely defined abilities, and when two or more channels converge upon the same ability, the interdependency of those channels becomes clearer. The generalizations I make to define each ability draw upon the evidence and suggestions Neisser proposes as being necessary for each self (pp. 37-54), and by no means is the list of channel-to-abilities relationships I present here exhaustive or exclusionary. Rather, it is meant to highlight the overlapping boundaries between the channels that Neisser presents as wholly separate.

The ecological channel's set of abilities includes sensation, which I use to broadly describe any physical sense belonging to the body that transduces a physical stimulus into a mental analogue. Sensation is necessary for perception of the physical environment surrounding the user's body, but alone it is insufficient to fully account for the ecological self. A handheld tape recorder, for example, cannot be said to have selfhood in the same way that a person with a functional sense of hearing does. A fuller account of the ecological channel must then include cognition, which I use to describe all mental operations acting upon that which is already in the mind. In humans specifically, belief systems, childhood development, memory, emotions, consciousness, language, and introspection all fall under the umbrella term of cognition. While it is

different from the ecological channel, the extended channel also requires cognition, specifically the ability to process and retain memories. The interpersonal channel's set of abilities similarly includes sensation and cognition. Another ability needed for the interpersonal channel is communication, which allows a human to convert some mental item they have into an approximated physical signal, which may then be transduced into a resembling mental item in another person who has the ability to communicate. Communication is therefore a bidirectional ability that includes awareness of intersubjectivity. The conceptual channel requires communication and cognition; role assignments and developmental socialization happen only when a person interacts with others, and cognition is necessary to remember these beliefs about the self and what they require in the present. The conceptual channel also requires willpower; specific self-concepts rely partially on volition in addition to what is uncontrollably thrust upon a person in a social context, meaning that some possible self-concepts proposed to that person may be accepted or rejected. Willpower broadly includes a person's capacity to act in one manner over another option, to deliberate about all options, to make judgments about what they know, to assent to beliefs or to reject them, and so forth. My definition of willpower also presupposes the rejection of hard determinism and solipsism, which Neisser himself seems to accept as well by allowing for personal agency and the mental activities that occur in other people as a requirement for true intersubjectivity (pp. 55-56).

Finally, the private channel's set of abilities includes impermeability, by which I mean the property of a single human mind **M** containing some mental unit of knowledge **X** that makes it impossible for other human minds to learn the **X** as it appears to **M** unless the person who contains **M** chooses to express **X**. Impermeability and the private channel are therefore related to the interaction of willpower and communication, as impermeability is overridden only by acts of communication, which are then, through willpower, chosen or rejected in favor of the act of communicative silence. I do not mean to claim that impermeability is necessarily an ability belonging to all possible minds, but I do find it to be acceptable on consensus that it at least belongs to human minds specifically; a plausible rejection of impermeability by induction would require scientific evidence supporting the existence of telepathy in human minds, of which there is a significant and near-unanimous dearth (Moulton & Kosslyn, 2008).

There are two main conclusions to follow from the modifications I have made to Neisser's model. My first conclusion is that the relationship between any individual channel and its set of abilities is one of mereological identity. I have outlined that each channel operates as Neisser intends only when its set of abilities is also operating. If the relationship were unidirectional but not bidirectional, it would be possible that the extended channel could function in a human mind lacking cognition, or that a human mind fully exercising its abilities of sensation, cognition, and communication could also lack an interpersonal channel. By allowing for such intuitively false possibilities, the unidirectional relationship is too imprecise. It is therefore necessary for my argument to maintain that a human's channel exists only with the existence of its set of abilities, and vice versa. It is possible for this mutual relationship to be one of necessary bidirectional implication, but this would permit the two items in the relationship to be separate but causally linked, which is not suggested by Neisser's empirical evidence, nor is it apparent from our aggregated definitions thus far. The simpler characterization of the relationship is one of identity, stating that each channel is identical to the set of abilities it requires. In essence, each channel describes a unified ability or something that is predicatively similar to abilities.

My second point is that the channels are not wholly distinct from one another. Each channel has a relationship with some other channel in which both channels have a relationship with the same ability. If the relationship between a channel and its set of abilities is one of mereological identity as I have just described, then it follows that each channel shares a part with another channel, causing one to be partially constituted by the other and vice versa. Those two channels cannot be considered to be wholly distinct, or else they would have to have no overlap in their constitutions. If the abilities are to be separated as a solution to this, then the specific grouping of abilities essential to Neisser's definitions of the five channels is potentially drawn arbitrarily or by convention alone.

My argument ultimately does not reject the existence of any self, nor does it outright reject Neisser's claim that these five channels are not exactly the same as one another. Instead, the distinction is made that the self is comprised of the sum of self-knowledge which an individual human mind contains, rather than being comprised of the five channels that permit the entrance of that self-knowledge into the container. In the same

way that an oven is needed to bake a cake but is presumably not part of the cake served at the birthday party, the channels are needed for the robust formation of the self in humans, but they are ultimately not parts of the self itself.

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Aidan graduated with a B.A. in Philosophy in Spring 2022. Within philosophy, he has developed an affinity for metaphysics, deductive reasoning, historical materialism, and social ethics. Outside of philosophy, he has been involved with the local Super Smash Bros. Ultimate scene. He would like to thank all persons who have demonstrated faith in him, regardless of their field or background.



# *Interviews with Iowa Philosophy Alumni*



Kate received her B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Iowa in 2020. She is primarily interested in the overlap between metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of science. This has typically manifested in discussions of methodology, especially concerning how we use language (or, how we should use language) to solve metaphysical and scientific problems. She has a strong interest in late-Wittgensteinian philosophy of language.

**C.J. Hellinger:** What did you want to study when you initially entered the University of Iowa? Why that field?

**Kate Lohnes:** I entered Iowa as a double major in Art and Creative Writing. I thought, at first, I'd like to write/illustrate books—Iowa is well known for its creative writing program, so that was a major motivation for me.

**Hellinger:** Why did you ultimately decide to study philosophy?

**Lohnes:** I took an Introduction to Philosophy course with Dr. Figdor my freshman year to fulfill a general education requirement, and absolutely fell in love with the philosophical method. I decided to take more courses in philosophy as a result, and eventually, one thing led to another and philosophy became my primary major. I'm so glad I took that course freshman year! It completely changed my life's trajectory.

**Hellinger:** Was career advancement a significant topic on your mind when you chose to major in philosophy? If so, can you recall what those thoughts were like?

**Lohnes:** Honestly, career advancement wasn't something I spent too much time thinking about. I knew I loved philosophy and academia (both research and teaching!), so the natural path for me was to pursue a PhD in the discipline. I knew I wanted to teach, and I knew I wanted to do philosophy, and both of these things were achievable should I pursue a PhD. So that's exactly what I did—and I've loved every second of it!

**Hellinger:** Why did you choose to continue your study of philosophy into graduate school?

**Lohnes:** I have such a deep love for philosophy and teaching it. As a PhD student, I knew I would not only have access to novel ideas and research, but would also be in a position to teach philosophy and think critically about pedagogy. It was really a no-brainer for me—and since I wanted to teach philosophy in a college someday, I knew this was the best path for me. It has been such a wonderful experience, and has exceeded my expectations in every single way.

*"I took an Introduction to Philosophy course with Dr. Figdor my freshman year to fulfill a general education requirement, and absolutely fell in love with the philosophical method."*

**Hellinger:** Did you study any other fields or take any interests in other fields while at Iowa? If so, do you find yourself using those other fields or interests, or combining them with your study of philosophy at Wisconsin?

**Lohnes:** I got a degree in Creative Writing as well as Philosophy, which I think really helped my writing skills. My primary area of research in philosophy is philosophy of science—a passion which I discovered through my honors thesis at Iowa (which was a philosophical investigation into some popular interpretations of quantum physics). I am a big advocate for taking courses that are very much outside the major, as I never knew science interested me until I took some general education science courses. My time at Iowa was invaluable in helping me discover this area of interest—and I have all of my old professors to thank (profusely!).



Phoebe is a rising 3L law student at the University of Iowa Law School. She graduated from the University of Iowa in December of 2019 with a B.A. in Philosophy and a B.S. in Economics. She is passionate about helping underprivileged and marginalized groups, and she realized that a career in law was the best way for her to do that. She is primarily interested in working with children and families that cannot afford traditional legal services, and is planning to ideally work in a legal aid office or another non-profit law firm upon graduation.

**C.J. Hellinger:** What did you want to study when you initially entered the University of Iowa? Why that field?

**Cooper:** I came to Iowa originally interested in Physical Therapy. For some reason in high school, I had decided that would be a good career that I could be good at. I was interested in helping people and I thought that a career in some sort of medicine would be good. However, I also knew that I was not cut out to be a doctor that had to deal with blood.

**Hellinger:** What else helped you decide to switch to a philosophy major?

**Cooper:** About halfway through my freshman year, I realized that I did not enjoy my science classes as much as I thought I would. I knew that if I was going to continue on the path to PT school, I would need to take a lot more science classes.

**Cooper (continued):** I didn't want to do something that I didn't enjoy, so I dropped my pre-PT track. At that point, I don't think I had declared a major yet outside of being "pre-PT". I had taken "Matters of Life and Death" with Professor Hasan and really enjoyed it. I also had read a lot of philosophy in my English classes in high school and knew I really enjoyed it. So, at that point, I knew I wanted to at least explore philosophy. I think I officially declared my major in the spring of my freshman year. I had decided that I wanted to do something that I loved, not just something that would make a good career. So, even though I had no idea what I would do with a philosophy degree, I decided to pursue it.

**Hellinger:** Was career advancement a significant topic on your mind when you chose to major in philosophy? If so, can you recall what those thoughts were like?

**Cooper:** After I declared my major in Philosophy, I started to think about after college what I wanted to do ... I think at one point I looked up "what can I do with a philosophy degree?" and law school was one of the top responses. That got me thinking about law school, and as it turns out philosophy was a great path to get me to where I am now ... I got a philosophy degree because I loved the way you had to think and the types of readings we had to do. I loved thinking and writing and debating with my classmates. Everything about my philosophy classes excited me and filled me up ... Looking back, I am very thankful that I decided to go after what intrigued me instead of what was "practical" because it was so much more fulfilling.

*"I had taken "Matters of Life and Death" with Professor Hasan and really enjoyed it."*

**Hellinger:** How has studying philosophy at Iowa helped you in law school?

**Cooper:** My philosophy classes and environment in the [English-Philosophy Building] really got me to consider law school in the first place ... I discovered skills and desires in myself that I didn't realize I had before taking my philosophy classes ... Additionally, my philosophy classes prepared me well for the LSAT and looked good to law schools on my transcript. In law school, you obviously have to do a lot of reading and a lot of research... [a]ll those skills we did in philosophy classes helped tremendously in my legal writing. I also greatly appreciate the way that philosophy classes made me comfortable with (sometimes heated) discussions with peers. I learned how to be respectful of others' views, but also to stand up for what I think and believe, which is extremely helpful in law school classes, especially the discussion-based classes.

**Hellinger:** Did you study any other fields or take any interests in other fields while at Iowa? If so, do you find yourself using those other fields or interests in law school?

**Cooper:** Oh, I think I answered this question in my answer to the previous one. But yes, my philosophy classes definitely contributed to me going to law school. They are where I discovered my strengths and passions that showed me I would thrive in law school. They also prepared me very well for the challenges that I've seen in law school so far.

# About the Editors

Jill was the Head Editor and the designer of this edition of *Labyrinth*. She is a senior at the University of Iowa and plans to graduate in December 2022. She was an intern for the UI Philosophy Department this Spring, and she has been involved with Iowa Lyceum, a philosophy summer camp for high school students. This was her third time serving as an editor for the journal.



JILL SCHENCK  
(SHE/HER)



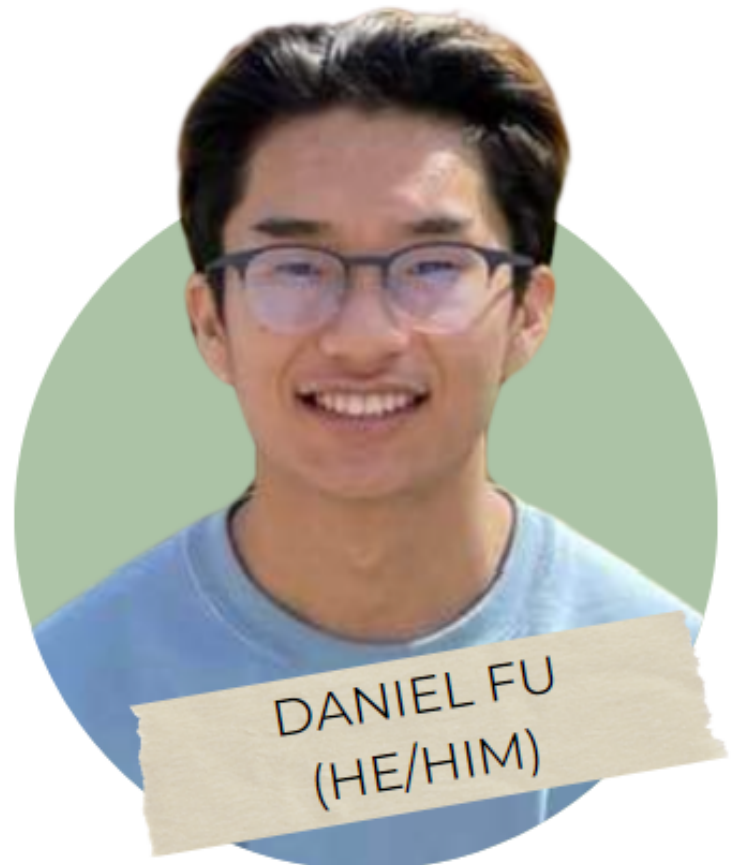
C.J. HELLINGER  
(HE/HIM)

C.J. was an editor for this edition of *Labyrinth*. He is a rising sophomore at the University of Iowa majoring in Philosophy and Sociology. His interests include the philosophy of language, social philosophy, sociological research methods, and housing inequities resultant from policy and urban/regional planning practices. Currently, he plans to attend law school upon graduation.



John was an editor for this edition of *Labyrinth*. He is a rising senior at the University of Iowa majoring in Ethics and Public Policy, and minoring in Sociology and Philosophy. His interests include evidence-based policymaking, applied philosophy, Constitutional law, and political philosophy. He plans to attend law school after completing his undergraduate degree with the intention of becoming a criminal defense attorney.

Daniel contributed to this edition of *Labyrinth* both as an author and an editor. See page 19 for his full bio.





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This is the first edition of *Labyrinth* that has included submissions from students outside of the University of Iowa. A sincere thank you to Brianna (The University of Nebraska - Omaha) and K.C. (Southern Utah University) for helping make this edition of the journal so special.

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