Janua Sophia

An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Volume XV  2013

Edinboro University of Pennsylvania

Edinboro, Pennsylvania
Janua Sophia

An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Managing Editor: Frank Hoffman
Executive Editor: Corbin Fowler
Consulting Editor: Shannon Fera
Copy Editor: Sarah Whylly

Janua Sophia is published once yearly by the Department of English and Liberal Studies at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and is dedicated to recognizing exemplary philosophical work at the undergraduate level. Essays submitted are blind refereed.

We are grateful for the support given Janua Sophia from Dr. Stephen Combs, Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Support for Janua Sophia comes from Edinboro University and the PASHEE Interdisciplinary Association for Philosophy and Religious Studies. For information about subscribing to Janua Sophia, contact Dr Corbin Fowler, Executive Editor, Janua Sophia, Centennial Hall, Edinboro University, Edinboro, PA 16444 or by email at cfowler@edinboro.edu.

Cover design by Shannon M. Fera. Photograph (from the Great Wall of China) by Seth T. Miller.

Copyright 2013 by the Department of English & Liberal Studies, Edinboro University
Janua Sophia

Submission Information:

Essays should be typed and double-spaced, no more than 12 pp. in length and conform to MLA style. Papers may be submitted electronically to the email address below. Submissions should be the original work of the author and may address any topic in Western or Eastern philosophy. Authors should avoid the use of first-person pronouns such as ‘I’ or ‘my’ in papers submitted to us. Special consideration will be given to essays which deal with Eastern thought and the relationship between Eastern and Western thought. The author’s name should appear on a separate title page and nowhere else in the submitted essay. Also, include an abstract of the essay, 300 words maximum. Be sure to include your name and current mailing address in your cover letter. Multiple submissions are permitted. Normally, the submission deadline for priority consideration in the next issue of Janua Sophia is April 1. Essays submitted after that deadline will still be considered, but will have a lower priority for appearing in the forthcoming issue.

Submissions and inquiries should be sent via email to: Dr Frank Hoffman, Philosophy, West Chester University at: FHoffman@wcupa.edu
The phrase "Janua Sophia" is a synthesis of the Latin *janua* meaning 'doorway or passage way' and the Greek *sophia* meaning 'wisdom'. So, literally "Janua Sophia" means 'doorway wisdom'. This concept can be understood in two ways: the doorway to wisdom or the wisdom of the doorway. Both are relevant, but it is the wisdom of the doorway which is the focus of *Janua Sophia*. A doorway is the point of transition between two places: a balanced center which connects two realms.

The Roman god Janus, whose name is derived from *janua*, is the god of both beginnings and endings. Typically, Janus is depicted as dual-faced, in symbolism of looking simultaneously forward and backward. The major time of sacrifice to Janus was the first day of the New Year, being the temporal expression of these qualities. From *janua*, the English language derived the name of the month January. Accordingly, the time of minor sacrifice to Janus was the first day of each month.

Traditionally, temples to Janus had a doorway facing the East and a doorway facing the West. It is thus the humble mission of *Janua Sophia* to be like a doorway in thought, connecting the East and the West.

Shannon M. Fera
Consulting Editor
Co-founder of *Janua Sophia*
Janua Sophia

An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Contents Volume XV 2013

Editor’s Introduction......................................................... i

The Human Destiny of Being: An Essay on Existential Angst as a Realization of Human Helplessness
Carl-Fredrick Korsnes (West Chester University)......... 1

Minas’ God and Forgiveness: A Critique
Benjamin P. Zieger (Slippery Rock University)............. 13

Swinburne’s Is There a God?: A Critical Response
Jared Figel (Slippery Rock University)......................... 23

Existential Commentary

A Reading from the Letter of Bruce to the World:
The Religious Metaphysic in the Music of Bruce Springsteen
Annette M. Mackay (Edinboro University)...............38

Referees & Announcements 51
The Human Destiny of Being:
An Essay on Existential Angst as a Realization of Human Helplessness
by Carl-Fredrick Korsnes

[An earlier version of this paper was presented August 12, 2013 at the XXIII World Conference of Philosophy, Athens, Greece.]

The Norwegian expressionist painter Edvard Munch tried to illustrate on canvas his personal experience of angst. On an evening in 1892, Munch and a couple of his friends were walking around Ekeberg, outside the center city of Oslo, when he had this experience with immense psychological impact, the memory of which he rendered into a poem:

_I was walking along the road with two friends – the sun was setting – I felt a wave of sadness – the Sky suddenly turned blood-red. I stopped, leaned against the fence. Tired to death – looked out over the flaming clouds like blood and swords –The blue-black fjord and city – My friends walked on – I stood there quaking with angst – and I felt as though a vast, endless Scream passed through nature._

– EM, 1829 (Munch)

Munch’s experience worked as inspiration to his famous painting _The Scream_. The Danish philosopher and early existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard, shared existentialist philosophical views with Munch. Both considered anxiety predicate to life, caused by the human existence itself (Kierkegaard and Johansen 25). Kierkegaard would certainly have called Munch’s experience an occurrence of anxiety, or _angst_.

The concept of anxiety is described by many a philosopher, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and, perhaps most significantly, Søren Kierkegaard. According to Kierkegaard, _angst_ is an unfocused fear, and is a way of acknowledging that the human is not in full accordance
with itself. In his book *The Concept of Anxiety, or Begrebet Angest*, Kierkegaard compared life to standing on the edge of a tall cliff – which has become a common metaphor in the philosophical tradition of existentialistic anxiety – claiming that we experience anxiety because we have the complete freedom to choose to either throw ourselves off or to remain static. He called this the dizziness of freedom. This aspect of freedom has been interpreted by several philosophers in later years, as mentioned, and tends to conceptualize the freedom causing anxiety by connecting it to certain situations. Essential to the philosophers’ concept of angst is that it is a feeling distinct from fear, which is connected to specific objects.

When reading, given that fear and angst are essentially distinct, about angst, as being caused by the freedom between all choices in life, the theory of freedom as source of human angst seems erroneous. In this paper, it will be argued that the freedom alone, as a human state in direct connectedness with responsibility based on outcomes of actions, which is described by philosophers to be the source to existential angst, is insufficient as a possible reason for angst. If the dizziness of freedom is the angst’s sole origin, then existential angst is a state based on the fear of the possible consequences embedded in this freedom – following this reasoning, angst equals the state of fear, as it is connected to beings-in-the-world. When this has been proved clear, it will in this paper be argued that freedom is – at best – a preliminary cause of angst, which can have the ability to lead up to a realization of humans’ inevitable lack of freedom. This human destiny, existing with an inevitable lack of
freedom, is the only possible origin of existential angst distinct from mere fear.

Existential anxiety, or angst, is united with human existence in the world. Anxiety is a feeling, or experience, within the human existence; there seems to be an aspect, or certain aspects, to the consciousness of life that cause some sort of horror within us – a horror that differs from fear. How they differ varies, as there are as many kinds of fears and anxieties as there are people experiencing them. However, understanding the significance of anxiety, being a consciousness of self-understanding that is distinctive from fear, gives valuable insights in human existence.

One might ask: why does there have to be any distinction between fear and anxiety at all? What if anxiety is just a kind of fear, only with slight differences? To offer this question a worthy response, it becomes a necessity to briefly analyze human conceptual understanding, and ask how any feeling can be distinguished from another at all. For example, humans view sorrow and anger as two separated feelings. Although they might intertwine, as both sorrow and anger - which will be called sad feelings, often arising from negative experiences - there is something elementary that distinguishes them from one another. When separating sorrow from anger, however, there is no blueprint to how this distinction is defined. Human feelings are complex in nature and cannot be solved like mathematics. Still, that does not mean that human feelings cannot be analyzed.

In order to evaluate human feelings, one needs to build on experiences and certain knowledge about humans. We know that there are noteworthy differences between sorrow and anger, as they appear due to different causes and produce
different reactions. Even though one might feel sorrow and anger at the same time, humans still differentiate them. Also, perhaps most significant, human consciousness is different from animal consciousness in that human mind has the ability to reflect upon its own life and being. Angst is an example of the horror that can arise by such self-conscious thinking and reflection. Therefore, angst is viewed as something that only can follow from human existence and consciousness.

However, not all self-reflection is a possible direct source for existential angst. Philosophers argue over how the self-consciousness of freedom constitutes the origin of anxiety, or angst, but seem to overlook the fact that when the focus of the freedom is the responsibility that follows and the possible (wrong) outcomes, anxiety is consequently – by following the argument – caused by the outcomes. Evidently, and according to the previously mentioned philosophers, fear has an object; humans experience fear before beings-in-the-world. Having this settled, and then realizing that the possible outcomes equal beings-in-the-world, it is self-evident that according to this argumentation, angst becomes essentially the same as fear – exactly what is attempted to argue against. In an attempt to solve this knot of misconception, a brief analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophy of anxiety will be presented as an example to make clear how angst can be defined as distinct from fear without connecting to any beings-in-the-world.

Even though the scope of this paper limits the possibilities of going in depth in Sartre’s philosophy, it will in this essay be made an effort show how a wrong focus on freedom, as the origin of angst, leads to an invalid conclusion. Sartre defined
fear and anxiety as two separate experiences. Our French philosopher is right in his attempt to distinguish between fear and anxiety – it is a distinction that has been shown to be critical to make. Even though Sartre’s arguments tried to claim that these two experiences are separate or distinct, an analysis of Sartre’s definitions of fear and anxiety through the metaphors he uses implies that the two feelings rather appear essentially the same within Sartre’s philosophy. Sartre argued, similar to Kierkegaard, that the human experience of anxiety is inevitable to life. Further, Sartre interpreted life as consisting of a human freedom that is distinguished entirely from anything outside the human self. Sartre characterized our existence as consisting of choices and claimed that anxiety is when “I distrust myself and my own reaction in that situation” (116-117). Arguing that anxiety - given that it is an experience distinguished from fear - arises solely from the self's horror from making decisions appears absurd, as previously stated, and is worth disproving.

According to Sartre, “anguish is anguish before myself,” (116) an interpretation that matches the existentialistic custom of privileging the self. He furthered his argument by using a similar example to Kierkegaard’s illustration of standing on the edge of a tall cliff. Sartre also wrote about vertigo being “anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over” (116). This description, as so many philosophical definitions, is vague and should be supported by examples to clarify exactly how Sartre defined anxiety – and Sartre provides the reader with images. In his example of a man who loses a great part of his wealth in a crash, the horror of poverty experienced by the man is categorized as fear. On the other hand, what is
Janua Sophia

considered to be the experience of anxiety is presented through the example of when the unlucky man starts to think: “What am I going to do? But what am I going to do?” Sartre agrees with Kierkegaard that angst is distinguished from fear “in that fear is fear of beings in the world.” He argued that fear is provoked by a situation, while anxiety may be experienced due to the self’s own reaction within that situation.

Because each individual has the responsibility for all things in the world and has to make choices, we experience anxiety. Each individual is responsible for the possibilities’ being or non-being, according to Monsieur Sartre. In his book *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre discusses the consciousness of freedom, he claims that anxiety comes as a result of freedom of choice. The freedom is linked to the absence of God, according to Sartre. After having denounced God’s existence, which Sartre did, the human suddenly has only itself to rely on. This responsibility can seem difficult to bear. One knows that one has to make all these difficult decisions in life, totally distinct from any divinity or any outside help of any kind, which in itself can be anxiety-inducing. One knows that each decision can, and often will, have huge consequences in later life. The circumstance of not having anything else to rely on except one’s self is that which Sartre argued could cause the feeling of anxiety.

First, when the question is raised regarding what Sartre’s idea here focuses on, it becomes clear that a ground pillar to Sartre’s argument is human responsibility, which according to Sartre grows when there is no God to rely on. In other words, God was believed to have responsibility for outcomes that humans relied on, and, when realizing the absence of
The Human Destiny

God, this responsibility is transmitted to humans. Why should humans rely on anyone in the first place? This is obviously a discussion for another occasion, but the question needs to be raised in order to make clear that Sartre’s concern is for the responsibility for consequences, as opposed to reliance on something external. The next step in analyzing Sartre’s argument is explaining what defines possible consequences.

We experience angst for being our own future as well as when playing with the possibilities in life (118-120), Sartre argues. He links anxiety to subjectivity; it is individualized and concentrated around the self. Sartre’s theory of anxiety due to “choices between all choices in life” is essentially a kind of fear, however, as the feeling occurs in connection with the possible consequences, which will be proven to be external objects. No matter how one may define choice, it is always connected to some kind of being-in-the-world. It is simply not possible to prove the existence of a feeling of horror distinct from fear – and which only happens before the self – and at the same time to claim that the same horror is caused by the choices in life.

One can ask what thoughts are included in fear of poverty, to use Sartre’s example, and surely one thought would naturally be: “What am I going to do?” The poverty itself, the situation of not having money physically in hand, is not what creates the horror, but rather the consequences that may subsequently follow. As a human being, one knows the potential negative effects that might come out of poverty, such as not being able to pay insurance, not having enough money for rent, or not being able to buy food. As a result of this human knowledge, one becomes worried about what to do. It
Janua Sophia

will not be precluded that one can reach a stronger, or more intense, state of fear, such as dread, but that is not necessarily correct to define as anxiety.

In order to make his argument clearer, Sartre presented the situations where there appears pure anxiety: “that is, without being preceded or followed by fear.” In this way, the two experiences should be more clearly distinguished, as anxiety does not interrelate with fear in any way. He defined pure anxiety as “anguish in the face of past” or “anguish in the face of future” (119-121). In order to clarify Sartre’s theory of pure anxiety, it is necessary to analyze an example he provided as a demonstrative metaphor. Sartre used the example of a compulsive gambler, who has decided not to gamble anymore in fear of hurting himself and his family (120). Approaching the gaming table, the gambler feels anxiety by an appearing apprehension of his own total inefficacy with regard to his resolution to quit gambling. The gambler has all possibilities to decide to follow his resolution, but can also “jump off” (here, clear analogies can be drawn to the cliff-metaphor). According to Sartre, this phenomenon, described as “the sight of the gaming table” (120), creates anxiety.

First, claiming that fear of the past results in such an intense reaction as anxiety seems strange, as the past is something humans have had relative control over. Sartre’s example of pure anxiety occurring in face of the past can very possibly be both preceded and followed by fear. First, there has to be a reason as to why the gambler feels anxiety when faced with past “sins”. For example, he might know the game’s dangerous addictiveness. The gambler might also be horrified of not following his resolution because he knows
what consequences might ensue if he fails in his resoluteness, or “jumps off”. He can have fear of losing his family, caused by a ruined personal economy. With this, one can see that Sartre’s notion of the past might be both preceded and followed by fear, at least indirectly.

As has been shown, a theory where anxiety comes from freedom alone, or “choices between all choices in life,” makes anxiety essentially a kind of fear. This is evident, as the outcomes prove to be external objects, or beings-in-the-world – the same source as fear. An alternative definition of angst will be presented in hope of solving the misconception of freedom as the sole origin of angst. If there should exist such a thing as anxiety distinguished from fear, the only correct theory is that anxiety truly happens before nothing, or more precisely, before life in itself – that is, the condition of being. When humans experience angst, it comes from an awareness of being in itself. Life is fragile and angst confronts us with the precariousness of existence.

People might find it hard to purely acknowledge this human existence in itself, as it might seem easier to live around every-day routines. Consequently, one can find oneself hiding from life and its deep questions and inevitable truths. However, this false certainty in life does not last. At certain points of insight, the horrific realization of the fact that one exists without having chosen to exist, and that one’s role in life all in all is desperately helpless, is humans’ certain destiny: the human destiny of being. One can make choices, but what difference does it make after all? For example, the destiny of existing is inevitably followed by the end of living as humans know it. This unavoidable feature of life can create horror, as the absence of power sheds light on our exposed
and defenseless situation as human beings. Acknowledging this state of our exposed existence is the pure consciousness of being. One can recognize the freedom of life, the freedom to choose between all possibilities, but it is first when one recognizes that one’s freedom has limits, owing to the fact that one lives the inevitable human destiny of being, that one experiences a pure consciousness of being. This consciousness results in the potential for angst.

This kind of self-conscious awareness of the helplessness, or precariousness, of being is distinguishable from the knowledge of the freedom of choices in that the realization of humans’ exposedness, or defenselessness, is not linked to any external objects. Crucial to this realization is the insight that human helplessness is linked only to being, or life in itself – that is, not in reference to any specific trait of life, or consequences in life, but to the condition of being. The helplessness imbedded in the human destiny of being must not be interpreted as the feeling of helplessness occurring in situations such as attempting to get out of poverty, or in the situation of catching a serious illness. Rather, the helplessness that creates the horror of existential angst appears on a different level. When one manages to get out of poverty, and perhaps even becomes rich, but still feel that something essential is lacking in life, or still cannot reason why one lives at all; when one survives the illness, perhaps even gets in better physical shape than ever before, but still knows that one will eventually and inevitably die anyway, or still cannot explain why one has exactly the personality one has – that is the kind of helplessness, or precariousness, that creates the horror of angst. Perhaps situations of living in poverty or getting a serious illness have more frequent
occasions of existential angst; if so, that is not because there is something imbedded in the situations of poverty or illness that works as the origin of angst, but rather that the situations often involve pondering about one's own existence and open oneself to the realization of the human destiny of being.

It is not argued against that life involves many choices; one is forced to decide between all possibilities at all times. Even when one does not make any decisions, one has to decide not to make a decision. Choices can be difficult to make, and can cause frustration. However, making decisions is only an aspect in the state of being, a single aspect extracted from being itself. As proven earlier in this essay, defining anxiety as a feeling based solely on consciousness of freedom to choose equates anxiety with fear – the significant distinction between the two experiences becomes void. Eliminating this distinction and appending the definition of fear and anxiety contradicts the human way of conceptualizing the two feelings.

Humans can experience a state of horror not connected to any decisions at all; it is a feeling not possible to equalize with fear, since it cannot be connected to anything specific other than life itself. To begin, when one recognizes that one's helpless state of existence includes aspects of life outside of one's control – the human destiny of being, one can attain a true consciousness of being, which can lead to a horror distinct from, and deeper than, fear: angst.
Janua Sophia

Works Cited
Minas’ God and Forgiveness: A Critique
by Benjamin P. Zieger

The idea that the Judeo-Christian God, whom believers claim is in every possible way “perfect”, is a loving, forgiving Lord has, for a very long time, been largely uncontested. However, in her article, “God and Forgiveness,” Anne C. Minas argues that it is logically impossible for a “perfect God” to be forgiving, and defends the claim that forgiveness is a quality which can only be harbored in human frailty – not within the perfection of a divine being. Minas supports this idea by defining “God” as having perfect moral sense, perfect moral will, perfect knowledge, and perfect benevolence and then comparing this divinity to several definitions of forgiveness: a reversal of moral judgment on an action, the rescinding or diminishing of punishment, a resignation of resentment against an offender, and the absolution of sin. This paper will set out to first make clear the boundaries of God as set by Minas and to then show how, by any of those definitions, God can forgive.

First, let us understand the ideas of a “perfect moral sense” and a “perfect moral will,” according to Kantian philosophy. A perfect moral sense would equate to perfect knowledge of the “moral law” or “duty.” Duty, as defined by Kant, is respect for a law, referring here to moral law. Moral law refers to the set of moral demands which ought to guide the will. A perfect moral will, or as Kant would
say, a divine or holy will, would never operate upon desires which might deviate from moral law.

With this in mind, God’s “perfect benevolence” seems wholly unnecessary. If God cannot act outside of His moral sense then His being benevolent is entirely superficial. In assuming that God has a perfect moral sense coupled with a perfect moral will, Minas limits God’s actions, as determined by His will, to behaving in accordance with His perfect moral sense. In order to maintain God’s benevolence, which is His good intention toward His creations, God must decide morality, making any action of God automatically “right.” God is not bound by moral law, but instead creates moral law. This may make God “arbitrary,” as brought up by James Rachels in his argument, “God and Goodness,” from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, but that is with the bounds of acceptability by believers for the following reason. A believer in God accepts God as his absolute Ruler and will therefore follow God’s commandments regardless of how arbitrary or contradictory they appear to be.

The last quality of God to discuss is His “perfect knowledge.” This has two components, the first is that God is omniscient and the second is that He is omnipercipient. Omniscience refers to God knowing all possible truths, not including the future actions that people will make, as human beings are guaranteed free will, as argued by Steven Cahn in “Does God Know the Future,” from *Questions about God: Today’s Philosophers Ponder the Divine*. Omnipercipience, Minas states, is the state of God knowing, feeling, and experiencing all truths,
emotions, and situations at the same time. In order for God to be omnipercipient, He must exist outside of time, and Minas makes this claim. Otherwise God would react with different emotions to different situations in time as time progresses, and in this paper I claim that He does. God must be able to react to changes in the future, because He cannot know the actions that people will take. God’s actions in time dictate that God must exist in time, and therefore God’s omnipercipience, like his omniscience, takes place in the present, in that God knows, feels, and experiences all truths, emotions, and situations only as they happen.

Now that we have some understanding of what it means to be a perfect, divine being, we can start looking at the different definitions of forgiveness that Minas introduces in her article. The first type of forgiveness is a reversal of moral judgment on an action. The wronged party believes that the wrong-doing party has done something wrong and that the wrong action performed by the wrong-doing party is being forgiven by changing or recanting a negative or harsh judgment and replacing it with a less severe or positive judgment. Minas’ argument is that forgiveness of this type creates contradictory judgments on the action in question, the initial judgment being one of censure and the second judgment being a reversal of the first. It appears impossible that God should make two different judgments on the same individual action because of His perfect moral sense and perfect moral will, which force Him to act according to moral law, necessarily entailing that one of the judgments must be
wrong. However, as discussed above, God creates moral law. If God is to change His judgments, then the most recent judgment takes precedence. The old decision was right; the new decision is right. God, permitted to change His mind and retract His previous declarations, will almost certainly forgive because of His benevolent nature.

On this same idea of forgiveness, Minas brings up the example that there are people who plead that mitigating circumstances ought to exempt them from God’s rule. If this is true, then the rule is faulty and God alone is accountable. This however, is not necessarily true. Mitigating circumstances do not excuse anyone from moral law, and God, at the time of His judgment, has already taken such things into consideration. Minas sums it up well herself when she writes:

*Complexities being no problem for a perfectly omniscient being, he would, if he used rules at all to make moral assessments, use ones which had the degree of complexity necessary to take into account all morally relevant factors in a situation to be judged. Our rules would only be crude approximation to these perfectly accurate divine rules, and thus while it might appear to us as if God is making an exception to his own rules (not judging an action wrong which is wrong by our crude rules) this appearance would be delusory* (28).

God does forgive some people due to mitigating circumstances, but their pleas for forgiveness due to these circumstances are inconsequential, because God has already factored them into His judgment.

The second type of forgiveness is the rescinding or diminishment of punishment, in which case the wronged
party is forgiving the wrong-doing party and not the wrong action. Minas brings up the idea that if God is acting in both a legislative and judicial manner, then why would He make laws He knew He would overrule? Minas goes on to say that if the punishment for a sin is deserved by the sinner, then forgiving the sinner and remitting the punishment would not be “perfectly just,” meaning that it would go against the perfect moral sense and the perfect moral will. Moreover, how can God only forgive some sinners, and not all? It seems unfair for God to forgive some people and condemn others. However, in accordance with being perfectly benevolent, God can be merciful in these situations and forgive. Forgiveness is not a detractor of justice or the opposite of justice: it is a part of justice, just as necessary to the system as punishment and reward, because forgiveness gives people hope, leading to a change in their behavior after the realization of disastrous possibilities.

People are imperfect. They make mistakes, and God knows this even better than we do as people. When someone makes a mistake or does something wrong, there is the possibility – not the guarantee but the possibility – that they will be forgiven if they choose to repent. Minas defines repentance as, “an overt expression of the agent’s realization of having done wrong, his having the appropriate feelings about his actions, and his resolve not to repeat them” (30). Repentance is perhaps the single largest reason for forgiveness. It fosters understanding between both parties and allows for “win-win” situations, which a benevolent God would certainly appreciate. When
Janua Sophia

a person repents, he admits his own wrongdoing; he sincerely feels ashamed of his wrong action; and he vows to never again, consciously, repeat the same wrong. This process is often underestimated in the extreme and it should be understood that this is not the sort of thing that can be worked out as a person is lying in the last ten minutes of their life. Repentance is more than being apologetic; it is a person changing his entire life because of a single, pivotal issue, in such a way that he would never commit that same wrongdoing. A person who repents is not asking for forgiveness for his action – indeed, it may be impossible for his action to be forgiven, as it was indeed wrong – but is asking for forgiveness for him as a reformed person. Repentance is why some sinners are punished and some are not, why some wrongdoers who deserve punishment are absolved, and why God can make laws He knows He will overturn, because even He does not know who will repent for their wrong actions. Because God cannot know the actions a person will take, being as people have free will, making the future decidedly indeterminate, true repentance has the power to earn forgiveness from the benevolent God.

In light of this, Minas asks why God should count the end of a sinner’s life more heavily than the beginning, and this is because God acts in time. God reacts to situations in time, so when a person repents they may be forgiven. It is due to God’s benevolent nature that He is willing to give more weight to the post-repentance time of a person’s life, during which that person has become a better person, than to the pre-repentance, post-sin time of a person’s life.
Minas moves on to question whether God can use forgiveness as a utilitarian tool, and states that this idea paints God as a manipulator using threats and bribes to corral people and make them behave appropriately. To clarify, a utilitarian would use the ideas of punishment and reward (or threat and bribery, stick and carrot, etc.) in order to improve the morality of His subjects. God, as a utilitarian, can be said to use the ideas of Heaven and Hell as reward and punishment, to bribe and threaten people into proper conduct. Minas states, though, that this method would be rendered useless after the death of the subject, because the subject would no longer be able to make a wrong choice. There are two responses to this claim. 1. When the subject dies it becomes time for God to be true to His word and punish him who was wrong and reward him who was right. 2. If one is to believe in an afterlife, which is implicit in the idea that there is the possibility of punishment and reward after death, then it is still possible to repent for one’s sins. The choice to not repent would be the “wrong choice.” To further this point, it may be through God’s punishment that a sinner is able to repent for his sins, and even that, in a sense, would be forgiving.

Is it possible, though, for God to forgive someone after punishing them? The question brings up the third definition of forgiveness, which is to resign resentment against an offender. Minas defines resentment as a moral feeling/attitude which is focused on a wrong or unjust action. The action is still wrong, punishment is still meted out, but any residue of negative feelings from the wrong-
doing would be released. Can God, though, feel resentment? If resentment is caused by personal injury, then what power do we, as imperfect beings and sinners, have to injure the perfect divine being? If we cannot injure God, can God develop any resentment to let go? By disobeying the laws that God has given us, we insult His mastery over us and we reject His moral law. This is injurious to be sure, enough so that a God who reacts to human decisions in time would be able to feel resentment and wrath toward them. Minas says that God cannot let go of His negative feelings because of His omnipercipience, but God experiences situations as they happen. Therefore He both feels resentment when He is wronged and has the ability, through His benevolence, to let go of any negative feelings He might harbor, just as any human being can.

However, is God the right being to forgive us? If someone breaks his brother’s arm, is it not from his brother that he should seek forgiveness, rather than God? Minas argues that only the primary injured party can forgive a wrongdoer or a wrongdoing. Is God not the primary injured party? It was, after all, His rule which was broken along with the brother’s arm. Forgiveness is not a single-sided affair, and it can come from any number of sources. One might feel insulted as a human being when another person commits an atrocious crime, and therefore that person would have to earn that person’s forgiveness, as well as the forgiveness of the victims of the crime and God’s forgiveness. Also, in order to earn forgiveness through the process of repentance, this person would have to forgive himself. God, as an injured party, reserves the
right to punish or forgive us for our sins as He sees fit. Forgiveness must be sought from every possible source in order to be thoroughly forgiven. When someone lies to her parents, she must seek forgiveness from them, from herself, from anybody who respects the integrity of her parents, and from God, also. People are extremely interconnected with one another, and this causes us to feel each other’s injuries, insults, and wrongs. This is another reason why the process of repentance is not easily accomplished.

The last type of forgiveness that Minas debates is absolution of sin, which as she readily admits, only God should be able to perform. This type of forgiveness, unlike the previous types, is a correction of the wrong action. The sin is absolved and no longer exists; the wrong action is made right, with no other change to anything else. Minas draws the analogy of a child-parent relationship between man and God, stating that this wish for absolution from God is, “like a child’s plea that a parent make things all right. The child imagines that rightness and wrongness depend wholly on the parent’s say-so” (36). While rightness and wrongness do not depend on a parent’s say-so, this paper has maintained that they do depend on God’s say-so. Having already decided that God’s word is both changeable and definitive regarding this issue, it stands to reason that forgiveness as absolution of sin is especially possible (especially if the sinner would repent!).

If we grant that God can forgive, in the sense of forgiving a wrong action by reversal of moral judgment, so long as He has reason to forgive; forgiving a wrongdoer for
Janua Sophia

his wrongdoing by lessening punishment because of his repentance, even when using forgiveness as a utilitarian tool; and/or forgiving by letting go of resentment held for the wrongdoers, who injured Him, then this Him the proper being to forgive them for their wrongs; and this would count as forgiving in the sense of absolution from sin, because God's word is both definitive in the moment and subject to change in the future. Therefore, it is absolutely certain that God, as a “perfect divine being” with a perfect moral sense, perfect moral will, perfect knowledge, and perfect benevolence, has both the capability and desire to forgive.

Works Cited


Swinburne’s Is There a God?: A Critical Response
by Jared Figel

[This paper was awarded 1st prize in the 2013 Spring Conference of the Interdisciplinary Association for Philosophy & Religious Studies.]

Science and religion have traditionally been viewed as mutually incompatible realms of insight, two antithetical approaches to the world caught up in a battle to obtain the truth—whatever this may mean. The modern age has seen the revelations of science overturn again and again the revelations of religion, divorcing the two ever further to the opposing realms they remain in to this day. In recent times, religion has had the opportunity to co-opt the findings of science to attempt to answer some of humanity’s most timeless questions, such as: Does God exist? In chapter four of his book Is There a God?, Richard Swinburne endeavors to answer this question with the aid of modern scientific insights and the ‘fine-tuning argument’ for the existence of God. He employs the principle of Occam’s Razor to defend his rejection of a multiverse (a rejection that is crucial to his argument) and asserts that he eschews any reliance on worthless ‘god of the gaps’ arguments. Despite his best efforts, however, Occam’s Razor, though a useful tool, cannot be applied outside of a scientific context. Also, Swinburne’s disclaimer that his argument contains no traces of a god of the gaps is misplaced; it is in fact structurally identical to that of any other argument of this type. The last section of this argument will address the concept of cosmological design and its inseparable relation to the frontiers of science. This paper begins by first establishing what
science means for us and its role in refining and ordering human experience.

To clarify the distinction between science and non-science, and the ontological implications stemming from both, it should be understood that anything within the explanatory scope of science falls into what we call the natural world. On the other hand, anything outside of this belongs to the supernatural world. (This distinction is meant only for purposes of explanation, not to be taken literally as a metaphysical truth.) It is vital to outline this distinction as a means to addressing Swinburne’s employment of Occam’s Razor. Generally defined, this principle states that simpler hypotheses, containing fewer assumptions, are more likely to be true than those that are more complex and hold a greater number of assumptions. It will then be argued that Occam’s Razor can only be used to compare scientific theories. Therefore, owing to the supernatural nature of God, Occam’s razor carries no validity in demonstrating the likelihood of His existence. The next step will be to show how Swinburne’s argument is one of a god of the gaps masked as one that empirically testifies to the probability of God’s existence. To do this, it will be necessary to expose the indispensable elements of Swinburne’s argument as those that are also indispensable to all arguments of this type. Finally, this paper concludes by summarizing the widespread misconceptions about how scientific theories relate to the natural world and the temptations that lead many to the conviction that scientific knowledge is nearing, or has reached, its limits.
Swinburne’s argument for the existence of God can be outlined as follows. He proposes that modern cosmological theories can be used to account for God’s hand in creating our universe. There are a host of theories that claim the physical laws of our universe are fine-tuned for the emergence of life. It is said that altering one of these laws even “by one part in a million would have had the effect that the universe was not life evolving” (Swinburne 109). Swinburne puts this scientific research to use, allowing him to cast the orderliness of our universe in cogent, quantitative terms. However, this sense of cogency is shaken by the theory of the multiverse. It is clear that the supposed fine-tuning of our universe’s fundamental laws collapses in the face of the cosmological models comprising innumerable other universes accompanying our own, each with its own physical parameters, and resultantly, its own prospects for the emergence of life. The uniqueness of our life-permitting universe is effectively relegated from being a miraculous and inexplicable feat of probability, reasonably ascribed to God, to that which is fairly common given the number of alternate universes. To deal with this, Swinburne must refute the multiverse theory. He resolves to do so, chiefly, by demonstrating that the scientific axiom of Occam’s Razor rules in favor of God’s existence. The argument goes that Occam’s Razor validates the simpler hypothesis over the more complex. Since God creating our universe is a much simpler hypothesis to explain its “fine-tuning” than countless other universes, it stands to reason that He exists and is the Creator of everything. His argument can be rendered as follows:
Occam’s razor dictates that the simplest explanation is the more correct explanation.

God is a simpler explanation than positing a multiverse.

Therefore, God is the more correct explanation (when compared with the theory of a multiverse).

Swinburne’s reasoning is encapsulated by the notion that science, through its display of unknowns and utter complexities in nature, leads directly to the only reasonable explanation for the existence of these things: God.

However, Swinburne uses science incorrectly to defend his position. As sentient beings inhabiting the world, humans have found multiple ways of coming to understand, as well as find meaning in, their experiences. In short, people must gain a sense of knowing as a means to order their experiences. Throughout history, the two principal avenues that have provided this have been science and theology. They are both designed to make claims about the world, to permit at least some degree of reasoning, and most importantly, to provide explanations. However, when it comes to methodology, science and theology can hardly be compared. This underlying difference is at the heart of why religious and supernatural claims cannot be integrated with the method of science.

The impossibility of this integration is not meant to speak directly to the disparity of the ontological domains in which the natural and supernatural respectively reside; for this would be putting the cart before the horse. To elaborate, the reason that the supernatural is
incompatible with scientific investigation is not because of any inherent ontological incompatibility—in fact there seems to be no defining boundary between the two. Instead, the reason comes down to understanding what claims are or are not compatible with the commitments of scientific methodology. Science is our understanding of the natural world, another way of knowing, and its methodology consists of repeatable experimentation through the merits of empirical study, verifiability, and testable predictions. We answer to nature to determine the value of any hypothesis. Over time, experimental predictions can be made more confidently. This predictability is how science offers its hand in ordering human experience.

Some claims about the world can be subjected to the rigors of this methodology. Others, on the other hand, simply cannot. This is fundamentally where the term supernaturalism gets its meaning, because, when we pause to consider what constitutes the supernatural, it turns out it is not something that is intrinsic to any object of the supernatural, as pointed out; it is based on the type of claim that is proposed. All claims designed to explain how the world operates are, for all intents and purposes, supernatural—though we do not typically describe them as such. Only until modern humans developed a system for testing claims—science—did some of these claims become scientific, and accordingly, were given the title of “theories”—a provisional step in the direction of the natural world. The discipline of science and its natural world sprang forth from the supernatural. Consequently, the natural and the supernatural are only vaguely defined
at their ontological boundaries; the two play a game of tug of war when science wishes to absorb a claim into its naturalized world. If the theory, through rigorous experimentation, holds up to scientific scrutiny, it is absolved of its supernatural status and integrated into the realm of the natural. The important point to note is that the two are not fixed in any way. They emerge incidentally from what questions are asked and pursued by the scientifically interested. The single reason we have a category called the supernatural is because of the type of claims that fall under its heading. In consequence of all this, one must not think about the natural and supernatural in a way that signifies “this world” in contrast with “that world.”

Thus far, this account has advanced the idea that scientific and supernatural explanations offer us different ways of understanding our world, and the sole reason anything is deemed supernatural is because it cannot be substantiated with the methodology of science. It is in this manner that Swinburne proffers his explanation for the existence of God by employing Occam’s Razor. But, utilizing this principle is tenable only when it concerns scientific claims. A claim that is immune to the procedures of science cannot be appraised relative to any other. There is no way to evaluate how such a claim is relevant or applicable to the natural world, or how to analyze what its key aspects are or any degree of superfluity that it may entail. Discerning what is essential to a theory and what is superfluous is in fact, the sole purpose of Occam’s Razor. This can only be done in relation to a competing theory, both existing in a scientific
Is There a God?

context. Moreover, with no standards by which to analyze such a claim, how can one purport that any given one is simpler or more complex than any other? In the God versus the multiverse scenario, God may very well be a more complex (or simpler) explanation, but there is no way to determine this.

Violating the tenets of Occam’s Razor by introducing the supernatural for examination with it paves the way for other types of absurdities, such as the runaway attribution of supernatural causes to all naturally observed phenomena. For instance, one may posit that God is always the simpler explanation than anything explained scientifically. Invoking the terms and mechanisms of atoms, electromagnetic fields, genetics, thermodynamics, etc. surely seems to be the more complex move when it comes to explaining a given phenomenon. In reference to the multiverse theory, Swinburne writes, “To postulate a trillion trillion other universes, rather than one God in order to explain the orderliness of our universe, seems the height of irrationality” (112). The problem with this logic becomes glaring when we apply Swinburne’s misuse of Occam’s Razor to any scientific explanation. The result is always the same: God, or the supernatural, wins. The mention of trillions and trillions of other universes, by the magnitude of its numerical quality, can certainly appear like an irrational proposition, but this is the case for any scientific claim with respect to the seeming simplicity of the supernatural. Darwin’s theory of evolution, by Swinburne’s reasoning, would also seem to be the height of irrationality compared with the much less complex
explanation of a divine Designer. The process of nucleosynthesis taking place in the sun’s core seems staggeringly irrational when the simple postulation that the sun is a heavenly beacon is on offer. As so far outlined, science provides us with a means to order, standardize, and structurally compare two competing theories. If a claim cannot be subjected to the commitments of science, its legitimacy cannot be evaluated and it has no place in the sphere of scientific discourse.

Now, Swinburne and other advocates of new design arguments may point to these counterfactuals concerning the theory of evolution and the synthesis of elements in the sun and contest that these are things science has explained, so no supernatural explanations are necessary. But the fine-tuning of the universe, they might add, has no scientific explanation. Therefore, a theistic explanation should count for something. To use Swinburne’s own words, “These phenomena are clearly ‘too big’ for science to explain. They are where science stops” (112). It is in these words that the prospect of a god of the gaps comes to the fore. Identifying the essential properties of this form of argument will determine if Swinburne’s can be exposed as one.

The first property can be self-evidently described as relying on a gap in scientific knowledge. In Swinburne’s case, this involves a lack of understanding of why our universe appears to be fine-tuned. Clearly, if we had scientific explanations for every question posed, the supernatural would play an unnecessary role in our causal explanations of nature.
Is There a God?

The second property of god of the gaps arguments expands on the first by stating that this gap in knowledge can never be filled by science. Simply put, the implication is that no human being now, or ever, will come to understand nature in a way that closes this gap. Not because these humans may lack the intellectual skills to do so, but because there can be no scientific answer; no answer that permits, however foreign to classical mechanics, the usage of theoretical concepts such as energy, particles, wave functions, etc. The only answer available has to exist separate from these concepts, framed in supernatural terms. Swinburne concedes these implications, thereby affirming his usage of a god of the gaps, when he asserts that science stops when we attempt to answer why our universe looks designed.

Finally, the last property is the necessity of scientific inquiry. Paradoxically, any god of the gaps owes its existence to science. It is science that answers empirical questions, but more often than not, science ends up asking questions, opening gaps in our knowledge along the way. This relates directly to Swinburne’s reasoning as to why his argument is characteristically not a god of the gaps. He states, “Note that I am not postulating a ‘God of the gaps’, a god merely to explain the things which science has not yet explained. I am postulating a God to explain what science explains” (112). He is in fact using God as an end-of-the-line explanation for the question of what science explains—in this case, why the universe appears fine-tuned. But viewing what science explains to produce seemingly insoluble questions is integral to god of the gaps arguments and, therefore, his statement seems to only
reinforce this idea. In what way and through what medium are we to derive these questions if not from another body of established knowledge? To illustrate, Swinburne is using science in the same manner that any scientist does when he or she encounters a hurdle in describing the natural world and follows through with questions. The only difference is that Swinburne identifies the universe’s orderliness as beyond science’s explanatory limit. This sequence of using science to demand explanations for the scientifically unknown is a constitutive feature of forging god of the gaps arguments.

At this point it is noteworthy to make clear just why this style of argumentation, abundant as it is in religious debates, seems to strike with such force. The reason, in part, rests on simple misnomers. The terms “fine-tuning” and “new design,” by which modern scientific explanations for God’s existence are designated, are misleading. When confronted by these arguments, many of their opponents will present the anthropic principle as a response. But because this principle cannot be falsified, this is not a very philosophically satisfying move. Realizing this, there are also those who may alternatively express, “We just don’t yet know why our universe appears to have this ordered arrangement.” This is nearer to the picture presently being painted, but not quite enough. The difference between these two responses is that the first implicitly concedes that the universe is fine-tuned but sweeps this under the rug with the assertion that this must necessarily be so if we wish to ultimately exist and observe it, whereas the second only admits that the universe “appears” to have qualities of design, far from anything factual. This
difference is central to what this fine-tuning really is: a mirage. Although Swinburne intends to use empirical data about our universe’s fundamental laws as proof of design, the very nature of scientific research prohibits such a demonstration. In short, it is impossible to draw the conclusion of a necessary physical order from observations of our world. For to do this would be to claim a complete and unfailing knowledge of the world; a perfect snapshot of the total state of affairs. Thus, many who wish to sidestep a god of the gaps by naively reporting that “it is what we know about our universe that leads to the conclusion of a deity, not what we don’t know,” seem to be mistaken. What we know we derive from a network of empirical evidence, the individual parts of which only holding significance in relation to others. Dissecting these relations through experimentation is the basis of scientific understanding. However, to think that we are approaching the edge of science, where our theories makes contact with the limits of what is theoretically understandable is unlikely; to provide valid evidence of this, impossible. Science does not reveal its limit to us in this way, if indeed there is one.

For clarity, it seems helpful to draw a conceptual distinction between what may be labeled contingent and necessary states. Contingent states can be defined as those that lend themselves to explanation, insofar as scientists can understand the natural mechanics that give rise to them. These mechanics may themselves embody further states of contingency, and so on and so forth. Necessary states, as the name indicates, are those that emerge from no natural phenomena; they are the
theoretical end-all and be-all, dictated and explicable by nothing. The essence of scientific practice concerns the territory of contingent states. We can characterize and make sense of aspects of the physical world by using preexisting theoretical concepts and facts already familiar to us. This is typically done by way of an explanatory reduction: the process of explaining phenomena in terms of more fundamental phenomena. As an illustration, the growth of a plant can be roughly understood by noting first its vast chemical composition, which elicits an array of inner cellular activity, which in turn gives rise to cellular division, which further still gives rise to stems, leaves, flowers, etc., etc. Each successive stage in this biological explanation presupposes an intricate network of contingent events that emerge in hierarchical fashion.

A problem arises when the scientific mind tries to extend its knowledge to depths well below what is contingently defined in its perennial search for a necessary state, that irreducible scientific law. The issue is not how we can ever reach this point. Rather, it is how we can ever know we have reached this point. Proponents of new design arguments tacitly affirm knowledge of this kind, spuriously justifying it with established science. However, to treat scientific data as empirically confirming the identification of this point is, in principle, unachievable; perhaps as unachievable as Wittgenstein’s attempt to illuminate the logic of the world through descriptive language in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. In both their efforts, he and new design advocates face a similar challenge: they must avoid a self-defeating presupposition. Turning first to Wittgenstein, his
account of why we can talk and think about the world leads to the conclusion that it must be inhabited by a logical space that mediates our relation to it. But to attempt a description of this logical space and its association with the world is pointless, since any proposition presupposes this association. Wittgenstein succinctly captures this limitation by writing, “That which expresses itself in language, we cannot express by language” (Baillie 97). This remark speaks directly to the downfall of new design arguments, for their premises presuppose the cosmic design they intend to demonstrate. It appears logically impossible to ever conclusively derive fundamental order from empirical facts—such that one can locate a point of necessity through observations of contingent matters. The reason for this is relatively straightforward. Any premises employing scientific understanding—contingent states—already carry with them, by virtue of their contingent nature, the presupposition of necessity. One cannot use empirical facts to conclude that a necessary order inheres somewhere in them; this is altogether self-fulfilling. In a related sense, what some consider necessary features of the universe are continually subject to possible reinterpretations as mere incidental events that supervene on those that are more fundamental. These events themselves are equally subject to the same conditions. Thus, when Swinburne points to the figures of particle masses and their corresponding forces as manifestations of cosmological engineering, one must respond by taking a cautionary stance. Insofar as the scientific discipline cannot escape its own methodology, that is, cannot
achieve a panoptical view disclosing its relation to a necessary arrangement of the world itself, these figures cannot be put forth as representing fundamental order in nature. It seems we are epistemologically bound to this form of ignorance.

The expected objection is that at some point in this hierarchy of contingent events there has to be a necessary and supreme law underlying the entire structure. Nothing thus far stated denies this; there is only the denial of this being shown scientifically—demonstrably. Much of the confusion that comes with attempting to understand the relationship between the natural and supernatural is due to the common perception of their respective domains as existing in themselves. This perception fails to capture exactly how the two are composed and what constitutes their fundamental differences. The natural simply denotes explanation via testability. The supernatural is that which cannot be investigated in this manner. There are no qualitative differences that extend beyond this. Accordingly, the contents and properties of both are always in flux, readily awaiting change in light of changing human experiences. The methodology of science is what gives the natural world its structure and predictability. For this reason, supernatural claims cannot be evaluated in any standardized way and, hence, are inapplicable to tools such as Occam’s Razor.

One reason people are so resistant to the belief that science, given enough time, will explain these things is because there seems to be no conceptual or theoretical room for scientific explanation in these contexts. In other words, how can physics, even with its wide array of
models and frameworks, ever put these mysterious phenomena in physical terms? Implicit in this question is the pervasive colloquial usage of natural and supernatural—the “this world” versus “that world.” Again, thinking this way betrays the tendency to view the natural and supernatural as firmly separated realms. Any number of theoretical frameworks can be devised to render a hypothesis compatible with scientific methodology. This is what gave us obscure theoretical conceptions such as wave functions in the field of quantum mechanics or singularities in the field of general relativity. Surely anyone from centuries ago would argue that a particle existing in infinite places at once or a singularity that can consume all matter within its vicinity, even light, are undoubtedly supernatural propositions. He or she would adamantly dispute the claim that those things are of “this world.” Such an example, as has been emphasized, approaches the terms natural and supernatural in their misleading, colloquial senses.

With all the foreign concepts and facts that science has asked us to embrace in the past, there will undoubtedly be many more to wrap our minds around in the future. For the world we call our own is continually being reconstructed and refashioned out of the world we call the supernatural.

Works Cited
Existential Commentary

A Reading from the Letter of Bruce to the World:
The Religious Metaphysic in the Music of Bruce Springsteen
(Annette M. Mackay)

Bruce Springsteen is an acclaimed American singer and songwriter whose early faith formation provides a religious metaphysic for the themes found throughout his body of work. Springsteen’s career began in 1973 with his first studio album *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* Part of his appeal lies in his storytelling about universal events. His characters are ubiquitous in that they reflect our parents, our friends, the person down the block and the girl next door. Their experiences are believable and familiar. Indeed, many times, we see our own stories told through his lens. Their feelings and situations mirror our own. Moreover, his characters, like us, want to find meaning in death, pain, relationships, poverty, fear, temptation, and love. These are life situations that, as author Andrew Greeley declares, “humankind in its long history has always considered religious”. Springsteen uses core concepts found in Christianity to find resolution to those circumstances. However, Springsteen is not a Christian artist like Amy Grant and others who sing purposefully about faith and its transforming power. True, “Mary Don’t You Weep” and “Jesus Was an Only Son” are unambiguously about religious figures, but it is in songs about everyday life where he reveals his spirituality. The music is infused with references to faith, salvation, redemption, and justice: concepts that are fundamental to
his native faith tradition. His songs are parables, rather than hymns, through which he reveals a philosophical foundation grounded in his “religious imagination” (Ference, Greeley).

Born in 1949 in Freehold, New Jersey, Springsteen grew up in a working-class Catholic family. His father, Douglas Springsteen, had difficulty finding substantive employment in order to support his family. Steady income came from his mother, Adele, who worked as a secretary. In a society with gendered roles for men and women, the struggle for the elder Springsteen to maintain his position as sole provider wore on him and resulted in strain between father and son (Kelly). Springsteen and extended family lived near other relatives in a predominantly poor part of Freehold. Together they worshipped at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church. Despite their poverty, Springsteen and his sister attended parochial school. Springsteen’s experience at St. Rose of Lima was tempestuous. He did not adjust well to the discipline or the religious culture, nor did he make many friends. In an interview, Springsteen admitted that, “In the third grade a nun stuffed me in a garbage can under her desk because, she said, that’s where I belonged. I also had the distinction of being the only altar boy knocked down by a priest during Mass” (qtd. by Ference). As time went on, the teachings of Catholicism became less believable and more irrelevant to his life. Eventually Springsteen stopped trying to reconcile the conflict between his understanding of the world and dogma of the church. After receiving confirmation at age
Existential Commentary

13, Springsteen left active practice of his faith (Kelly, Ference).

It is not uncommon for youth to slip away from religious practice. However, the effects of exposure to religion can be long lasting. Like a rap on the knuckles from the ruler of an angry nun, the religious indoctrination in Springsteen’s early life left a mark. As an adolescent, he rejected the Catholic rubric. While maturing, though, he recognized that his religious upbringing was inextricable from his persona. Relationships within his family formed essential elements of his identity. Moreover, religion and the church were fundamental to his family’s culture (Kelly). As reported by Neil McCormick, Springsteen offered this analysis of his religious heritage: “I got brainwashed as a child with Catholicism,” joked Springsteen, who says biblical imagery increasingly creeps into his songs almost unbidden. “It’s like Al Pacino in The Godfather: I try to get out but they pull you back in! Once a Catholic, always a Catholic.” This realization is significant to understanding Springsteen’s work. In an earlier interview with the New York Times, Springsteen explained the significance that while he was no longer a practicing Catholic, he felt that “as I got older, I got less defensive about it. I thought I’ve inherited this particular landscape, and I can build it into something of my own” (qtd. by Csillag). Faith, sin, evil, social justice, redemption, and salvation are prominent themes in the Catholic landscape. These themes are invoked elegantly in his songs as well.
Religion by its nature manifests its meaning through signs and symbols, which Springsteen uses to substantiate his stories. Water, for example, is a transformative element that symbolizes renewal. In his song, “The River”, the man and woman go “down to the river” (Springsteen, 1980) where at the water’s edge they initiate their new life. When reality thwarts their dreams, they return to the river to recover the idyllic hope they once had. Water and light are also sacramental symbols, which Andrew Greeley finds repeatedly throughout the Tunnel of Love album. In “Spare Parts”, Janey is a single mother who is disillusioned and frightened. Not knowing what to do, she kneels at her child’s crib and “cries till she prayed” (Springsteen, 1987). After taking her infant son to the river, she wades through the mist “waist deep in water how bright the sun shone. She lifts him in her arms and carries him home” (1987). The act of lifting represents an offering. Janey raises her son closer to God as if to introduce him and to receive God’s grace. Performing this sacramental act renews Janey’s spirit. She returns home with her son resolved to create a new life for herself and child. Another example from this album is the way the flowing river and moonlight show the singer his way back home to his sweetheart in “Valentine’s Day”. Overcome by fear, a man tries to run away from his love. Upon hearing about the birth of a friend’s child, he has an epiphany of what truly defines his life. Springsteen writes, “A friend of mine became a father last night. When we spoke in his voice I could hear the light of the skies and the rivers, the timberwolf in the pines” (Springsteen, 1987). The man
comes to realize that he was not afraid of love, but rather he was afraid of losing his love, his only Valentine. In “The River, “Spare Parts” and “Valentine’s Day”, the images of light, water, and children gently illustrate baptism. Greeley says of Springsteen’s work: “He is using in Catholic fashion these profoundly Catholic symbols of his youth: He is using light and water as symbols of rebirth.”

Springsteen’s understanding of the theological virtues of faith, hope, comes from his Catholic education. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, they are gifts from God that bring one into a divine relationship through repeated practice (Catholic Church 1812). Although faith is a virtue that is freely given, it is not a constant in life. The consequences of both human nature and the natural world, such as evil and illness, present a challenge to faith. Yet faith is fundamental to coping with the paradox of evil and the promises of God in order for one to achieve understanding in this life (Catholic Church164). Springsteen explains, “The loss and search for faith and meaning have been at the core of my own work for most of my adult life...Those issues are still what motivate me to sit down, pick up my guitar and write” (qtd. by Kelly). He illustrates this concept in the song “Land of Hope and Dreams”. The story initially appears to derive from one of Springsteen’s first hits, “Born to Run”, where two young lovers take off on an adventure, leaving behind a stifling life. However, a closer examination of “Land of Home and Dreams” (Springsteen, 2001) uncovers a different message:
Grab your ticket and your suitcase; Thunder's rolling down the tracks
You don't know where you're goin'; But you know you won't be back
Darlin' if you're weary; Lay your head upon my chest
We'll take what we can carry; And we'll leave the rest.

The Christian tradition holds that Christ is the companion to the pilgrim along the faith journey. Christ beckons his followers to "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...for my yoke is easy and my burden light" (New American Bible Mt.11:28-30). The New American Bible interprets this passage to mean that adherence to Christ's teaching will free the faithful from oppression that inhibits fullness of life. The metaphors in Springsteen's song suggest something similar. The suitcase is Christ's credo, which satisfies one's desire for fulfillment. Anything else is a hindrance that diminishes the quality of life. "Lay[ing] your head upon my chest," (2001) suggests rest, trust, and intimacy with the host. The traveler is "darling" (2001), an endearing name for God's beloved. One has the sense that traveler is not only invited to take the trip, but that the host desires his or her company as well. The song continues by describing the passengers on the train. It represents all humanity: "saints, sinners, whores, gamblers, losers, winners, kings, fools, and lost souls" (2001). Suggestive of inclusivism characteristic of post-Vatican II theology, Springsteen does not place restrictions on who is eligible to take the trip. Passengers travel with their companion and protector, Christ, "through fields of sunshine" (2001), a metaphor for
love and hope. In the concluding stanza of “The Land of Hope and Dreams”, Springsteen says the reward is salvation: “This train, dreams will not be thwarted. This train, faith will be rewarded. This train, hear the steel wheels singing; This train, bells of freedom ringing” (2001). Usually in Springsteen’s world, the road and travel mean escape (Ference), but here and in some other songs such as “Cautious Man” and “Thunder Road”, the road represents a journey of faith. The road takes believers along a horizontal path in search for love, meaning, and redemption.

However, faith is not necessarily an individual achievement. Catholics believe in the communion of saints, meaning that the faith of others, both living and deceased, brings blessings to all, especially through prayer. Catholics are taught that prayer lifts the heart and soul to God. The bravery of the first responders who entered the World Trade Center on 9/11 reminded Springsteen of this doctrine (Kelly). In the song, “Into the Fire”, from the album The Rising, the road is now the stairs. As the police and firefighters climb “into the fire” on that terrible day, their sacrifice becomes our strength and hope: “Somewhere up the stairs into the fire; May your strength give us strength; May your hope give us hope; May your faith give us faith; May your love give us love” (Springsteen, 2002). Springsteen echoes the image of souls ascending to heaven in the song titled “The Rising”: “Wearing the cross of my calling…spirits above and behind me…come on up for rising” (Springsteen, 2002). Springsteen’s work is a benediction. In these songs, he
softly blends images of prayer, sacrifice, and resurrection to fortify our faith as we struggle to understand the incomprehensible. This is something that priests and preachers do in times of doubt and confusion.

Homilists also help the congregation realize that human imperfection obstructs our relationship with God. Inspired by the short stories of Catholic author Flannery O’Connor, Springsteen uses sin and its sundry forms in order to frame the circumstances whereby his characters struggle to find faith and meaning (Ference). Many of his songs are about people who battle with temptation, live an insincere life, or become worn down to a point beyond caring. Nonetheless, they have a desire for holiness, that is, to restore their spiritual selves harmed by human failings.

For example, “Brilliant Disguise” is a song about the way lies and deception break apart a marriage. A man and his wife are estranged. They go through the motions, “Now you play the loving woman. I'll play the faithful man” (Springsteen, 1987), but the truth is that the trust they once had in each other is gone. Moreover, he feels that the relationship is hopeless. He warns her not to look at his palm because the future is grim. Although he tries to act the part, the man has doubts. Eyes act like windows and mirrors. He wants to know who they see when they look into each other’s eyes. Do they see the people that they are, or the people that they used to be? Are they behaving according to their true selves or their managed impressions, the “brilliant disguise” (1987)? The man realizes that his deception is sinful and the source of
Existential Commentary

hollowness in his life. The religious implication in this song, though, is subtle. It is not until the very end that the man admits that he is responsible and seeks forgiveness. He begs, “God have mercy on the man who doubts what he is sure of” (1987).

Christianity teaches that God has the power to overcome the wages of sin and evil. Heaven, moreover, is an existence free from want or need. Growing up, Springsteen personally experienced the effects of poverty and inequality, and his lyrics empathize with those whose hard work is uncompensated. In the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), Christ blesses those who are treated unjustly, promising vindication in the coming kingdom. Springsteen’s song, “The Promised Land”, has a Beatitudinal feel. Hardworking, humble people see their dreams disappear as they struggle to survive. They are poor in spirit, sad and sorrowing, yet they wait for a better day because they “believe in a promised land” (Springsteen, 1978). Peacemakers and those who persecuted for defending the rights of others earn a special reward as well. In “We Are Alive”, people who died fighting injustice have only lost their bodies. Their “souls and spirits rise to carry the fire and light the spark; to fight shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart” (Springsteen, 2012). Immortalized, they inspire the living to accomplish God’s work on earth to seek justice for the subordinated. In the Catholic tradition, they are saints.

While he makes many references to hope and salvation in his music, Springsteen is not always a joyful prophet. Kelly wrote: “Springsteen’s music has always wrestled with
questions of meaning and the difficulty of maintaining faith and hope in trying circumstances”. In some of his darker songs, specifically on his latest album *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen takes God to task for (apparently) not responding to the pain and suffering of His people. This album reveals faith that is struggling against the pressures of the long recession and increasing world tension. People are adrift on a dark sea in “Swallowed Up”. The beast, a symbol of evil, overtakes them as God’s promises fail to protect them: “We trusted our skills and our good sails; Our faith that with God the righteous would prevail” (Springsteen, 2012). Springsteen addresses God directly, and in no uncertain terms, in another song from this album. He tells the shepherd in “Rocky Ground” to “Rise up shepherd, rise up... Find your flock, get them to higher ground; Floodwater’s rising; we’re Caanan bound” (Springsteen, 2012). The flock is not mindless, like sheep, but rather they are dutiful and obedient. Yet as their prayers go unanswered, their faith is tested: “You pray for guidance only silence now meets your prayers. The morning breaks, you awake, but no one’s there” (2012). He presents a clear directive for God to take action. Springsteen warns, “Tend to your flock, or they will stray. We’ll be called for our service come judgment day” (2012). Feelings of abandonment by God take on a personal tone in “This Depression”. Springsteen describes how unanswered prayers have left the singer feeling lost, forsaken, and hopeless: “I haven’t always been strong, but never felt so weak. All of my prayers gone for nothing. I’ve been without love, but never forsaken. Now the morning
Existential Commentary

sun, the morning sun is breaking” (2012). This is a stark contrast from the optimism in *The Rising*. When life is devastating, it is difficult to remain faithful. Indeed, some of the Psalms, the Book of Job, and Christ’s agony in Gethsemane are biblical accounts of anger and frustration with God. Rather than showing disrespect, anger directed toward God is good prayer.

Religion shapes a person’s worldview whether or not one follows its prescriptions. It stimulates discovery about one’s origin and purpose for living. Regardless of the religion, performing rituals does not make one religious; living by its tenents accomplishes this. Bruce Springsteen’s boyhood Catholicism was more than a metaphysical foundation for his musical career. While he says that he does not attend Mass or receive the Eucharist, Springsteen nevertheless lives the principles that he learned both as a student at St. Rose of Lima School and at the family dinner table. He may not consider himself Catholic, but “his work is Catholic” (Greeley). As a public person, Springsteen has received recognition for his social advocacy and philanthropy. Through his life and musical career, he has exemplified what St. Francis meant by his pronouncement to preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words. Above all, Bruce Springsteen’s music is a perfect specimen of grace. I am confident that somewhere, a nun is smiling. Shocked and surprised perhaps, but smiling.
Janua Sophia

Works Cited
Existential Commentary


Janua Sophia

Referees
Jamie Phillips, Clarion University
Matthew Pierlott, West Chester University
Chuck Ward, Millersville University
Bud Brown, Mercyhurst College
Todd Lavin, Clarion University
Julia Aaron, Clarion University
Tom Manig, Auburn University
Frank Hoffman, West Chester University
Steve Sullivan, Edinboro University
Elliot Wreh-Wilson, Edinboro University (emeritus)
Bradley Wilson, Slippery Rock University
Andrew Smith, Edinboro University
Edward Abplanalp, Illinois Central College
Matthew LoPresti, University of Hawaii

Announcements
The 26th annual conference of the Pennsylvania Interdisciplinary Association for Philosophy & Religious Studies will be held in April 11-12 at West Chester University. Students are invited to submit papers and panel discussion proposals on any philosophical topic for presentation at the conference. Money prizes will be awarded the top three papers submitted, and all winners will be encouraged to submit their papers to the undergraduate philosophy journal, *Janua Sophia*. For more information, contact Professor Larry Udell, West Chester University: iudell@wcupa.edu
The 4th Annual Ravenclaw Interdisciplinary Conference will be held in October 2013 at Edinboro University. This year’s special themes are: foster care and adoption, bullying & teasing, and strategies for teaching literacy and moral development K-12. We will also welcome original HP fan fiction short stories, and any submissions concerning literary, cultural, mythical, or ethical issues raised in the Harry Potter saga. For more information about submissions, go online to potterfest.com, email Dr Corbin Fowler at corbinfowler3@gmail.com, or call 814 602 1694.

Journals

Aporia is an undergraduate journal of philosophy at Brigham Young University. Aporia is published twice each year, in the fall and in the spring. The fall issue is exclusively online; the spring issue appears in print. The deadline for submissions for the fall issue is usually in September and for the spring issue in late January or early February. The staff of Aporia consists of philosophy students at Brigham Young University. For more information contact them at: aporia@byu.edu
Stance is an undergraduate philosophy journal published at Ball State University. *Stance* welcomes papers concerning any philosophical topic. Current undergraduates may submit papers between 1500 and 3500 words in length (exclusive of notes and bibliography). Papers should avoid unnecessary technicality and strive to be accessible to the widest possible audience without sacrificing clarity or rigor. They are evaluated on the following criteria: depth of inquiry, quality of research, creativity, lucidity, and originality. For more specific guidelines see the website at: http://stance.iweb.bsu.edu

****************************************************************
****************************************************************

Episteme is an undergraduate philosophy journal published at Denison University. *Episteme* is a student-run journal that aims to recognize and encourage excellence in undergraduate philosophy by providing examples of some of the best work currently being done in undergraduate philosophy programs. *Episteme* is published under the auspices of Denison University’s Department of Philosophy. *Episteme* will consider papers written by undergraduate students in any area of philosophy. Papers are evaluated according to the following criteria: quality of research, depth of philosophic inquiry, creativity, original insight and clarity. For more information, contact them at <episteme@denison.edu>.