Dear Reader,

In October, a year after I was blissfully studying his poetry for the Junior Lyric Project, Richard Wilbur passed away. The perspicacious elegance of his life’s work seems to encapsulate the aspirations of each author in this publication: “It is by words and the defeat of words, / Down sudden vistas of the vain attempt, / That for a flying moment one may see / By what cross-purposes the world is dreamt” (“An Event”).

The works in this journal demonstrate their authors’ “attempt” to capture, through the medium of language, paint, or camera lens, a clearer glimpse, a deeper understanding, of truth or beauty, or even both. I haven’t capitalized those two ideals, because they are already such giants that they so easily overwhelm a work. To test any work by that measure, “Did-ye-seek-Truth?” would be unfair. Yet, each work seeks to understand, illustrate, or represent some integral portion of the human experience: final things, faith, perception, reality, existence, epistemology, and wonder.

What first drew me to Wilbur was his ever-evident sense of wonder, his utter delight in and love of this world. But, in him I found so much more, a person who, through his vision and language, contends gracefully with “vain attempt[s]” at uncovering the “cross-purposes” of this world. These authors and the students of the University of Dallas inspire a similar admiration.

Thank you,

Theresa Guin
Editor-in-Chief
The conflagration swallowed the wooden hut from the top of the mountain. I watched the fire chew and spit out the remains of the swing-set, watched it toppling down into the woods right to the bottom of my feet, trees slowing the fall. People screaming, tumbling into me, pushing me aside. The sky was splitting open. Someone had grabbed my hand, pulling me to run. Run where? Where?

My heart drumsticks on dry skin over conga drums. Roaring in my ears. Ice in my bones. The volcano thrusting a majestic fan of black ash.

I watched them run into the forest that would be nothing but dust in a few minutes. Some carrying their children, dogs, jewelry. The Chief begging the farmer’s wife to ride off with her in the rusty wagon he had mocked several weeks ago. Sourness gnawed my taste buds with such fierceness that I had to smile. I marveled at how little titles meant when Death came bearing gifts. What was I to do? Could I welcome him with a wide embrace?

I searched for the gardener. He was the only one standing other than me. Sweat drizzled from his tan face; grey eyes soft in a kind of awe, glistening due to the reflection of the flames; coarse hands muddy, dirt under his fingernails, eternally loyal to the shovel in his right hand; a sapling—an olive tree—in his left. He turned towards me—looked at me straight in the eyes.

It was then that I saw everything. Ignoring the volcano, and the people, and the flames, and the ash, and the rabbits and deer rushing past me that were closer than ever before, I walked towards him—his eyes a magnet reeling me in. Moisture clung to his lips and cheeks. For once, I was not repulsed by sweat and grit. He was beautiful—by far the most beautiful man I had ever seen.

“I have two,” he grunted, pointing at the second sapling beside his feet. I believed that was the first time he had ever spoken to me.

The holes had already been dug up. All that was left was to plant the olive trees. “We only have a few minutes,” I murmured breathlessly, trembling.
He placed his hand onto my shoulder firmly, “Then we mustn’t waste time.”

“I hadn’t seen this coming—all of this. This death. I wasn’t as prescient. If I had only—”

“Not many do. Death is the last neighbor we think of, even though he’s the one that lives right next door,” he cut in, grasping my arms, drawing me to the earth, “Now dig, son.”

I stopped trembling.

I felt the ash and dust fill my nostrils, felt the irritants scratch my throat as I began to cough. I felt the warm earth as I slowly picked up my olive tree. It brushed my skin tenderly, and I believed I had never loved something so incandescently in my life. The gardener had already finished planting his own tree; he reached out, clasping his hands around my own. Together we patted it into the earth.

“Don’t be scared,” he said softly, his eyes gleaming with an odd, genuine relief. They were the color of amethysts, not of something grey. Our foreheads touched. I marveled at him, marveled at the heat, marveled at the world collapsing upon us.

“I am scared no longer.”

He smiled.

I smiled.

And Death greeted us, bearing gifts.

Breaking the Silence: Consciousness and Moral Agency in Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence
By Victoria Nelson

In the body of criticism surrounding The Age of Innocence, much has been made of the narrative point of view. Most critics rightly acknowledge that, although the action of the novel is related in third person, it is largely experienced and processed through the main character, Newland Archer. They also acknowledge, however, that the way Newland perceives and acts in the world around him is heavily conditioned by his society. Questions of moral agency and consciousness in The Age of Innocence, therefore, cannot be addressed without first examining the single most dominant consciousness in the novel, that of New York society itself, in addition to that of Newland, who is more overt representative. Unlike his wife, May, who will prove to be an agent in her own right, Newland never manages to separate himself fully from the collective consciousness of society, which has ruled his life since before his first appearance in the novel.

The opening paragraphs of The Age of Innocence are fraught with collectives. The narrative voice indulges in frequent quotations without individual speakers. There is “talk” of a new Opera House “above the Forties.” The conservatives as a whole cherish the old Academy of Music because it keeps out what they call “the ‘new people.’” The press has “already learned to describe” those attending the opera that season “as ‘an exceptionally brilliant audience.’” Other groups include “the sentimental” and “the musical,” each of which has a uniform opinion on the matter of Opera Houses. The final generalization reaches out with a sweeping gesture to encompass all Americans, whom, the narrator notes, without exception, “want to get away from amusement even more quickly than they want to get to it.”

Into the midst of this societal chorus, Newland Archer emerges on the scene. He is late to the Opera, and for “no reason,” the narrator says, except “that in metropolises it was ‘not the thing’ to arrive early at the Opera; and what was or was not ‘the thing’ played a part as important in Newland Archer’s New

2 Ibid., 3.
3 Ibid., 3.
4 Ibid., 4.
York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his fore-

fathers thousands of years ago.” Thus the first thing we learn about Newland

Archer is that he conducts his life strictly in accordance with the dictates of so-ciety. It is worth noting, however, that that society is described as his “Newland

Archer’s New York.” This could merely refer to the fact that he is the main char-

acter and that the New York described is the one in which he lives, but another

layer of significance is suggested by the second thing we learn about him, which is

that “he was at heart a dilettante, and thinking over a pleasure to come often
gave him a subtler satisfaction than its realization.”

Newland prefers to live in

his own mind, rather than in the external world, and thus it seems possible that

“Newland Archer’s New York” is, to some extent, his own idea of the society he inhabits.

The idea that Newland lives primarily in a world of his own mental

construction bears itself out repeatedly throughout the novel. The first time he

visits Ellen alone in her room, he becomes fixated on the idea that being with

her has somehow transported him to an exotic land where offering the advice

with which he came would be “like telling someone who was bargaining for at-

tar-of-roses in Samarkand that one should always be provided with arctics for a

New York winter.” Once equipped with this simile, Newland does not let it go,

and it progresses from figure to reality in his mind. While at first New York only

“seemed much farther off than Samarkand,” by the end of the paragraph New-

land has settled himself firmly in the land of his imagination, where he fancies

that he is seeing “his native city ... He is perturbed by how “small and distant” it appears, as though it were seen “through the wrong end of a telescope.”

The Samarkand illusion appears once more in the scene, when, after

a brief moment of intimacy with Ellen, “far down the inverted telescope he saw

the faint white figure of May Welland--in New York.” Although, as soon he

steps outside, New York becomes once more “vast and imminent, and May

Welland the loveliest woman in it,” this episode will be recalled much later in

the novel, as Newland sits with Ellen in his wife’s brougham and dreams of a

land where there are no mistresses or wives, only people who love each other.

Ellen challenges him to “look, not at visions, but at realities,” but Newland

refuses the challenge and tries to tell her that he is “beyond that,” a claim which

she refutes immediately and vehemently.

This beyondness which Newland--at least according to Ellen--mistak-

enly believes he possesses is the key to understanding the relationship between

his consciousness and the collective consciousness of New York society. In

the opening chapter, after spending a great deal of time thinking about May,

Newland turns his attention to the other “carefully-brushed, white-waistcoated,

buttonhole-flowered gentlemen” at the Opera with him, to whom “in matters

intellectual and artistic he felt himself distinctly the superior.” Yet no sooner

are his feelings of superiority exposed, than the narrator immediately undercuts

them by explaining that these men whom Newland disdains nonetheless “repre-

tended ‘New York,’ and the habit of masculine solidarity made him accept their

doctrine on all the issues called moral. He instinctively felt that in this respect it

would be troublesome—and also rather bad form—to strike out for himself.”

In the realms of the mind, Newland considers himself of the utmost excellence, but he largely disregards the practical concerns of morality, leaving those to others

of whom he readily thinks as inferior. One can perhaps infer his opinion on mo-

rality in general: that it is a lesser science, better left to lesser men who cannot

always dwell in the higher strata of art and philosophy. He submits to the laws of

the land, not because he has any strong moral sensibility of his own, but because

he feels that it would “troublesome” and “bad form” to do otherwise.

“Form,” the narrator tells us shortly thereafter, is important to Newland

because it is the “visible representative and vicegerent” of “that far off divinity”

known as “Taste.” He attends to form because he must, but form is rather too

concrete for him; he prefers the vague aesthetic notions of taste. Thus, when he

abides by the dictates of form, he does not do so thoughtfully but instinctively.

He has some vague sense that to behave contrary to the dictates of the collective

moral consciousness of New York would be bad form, so he follows the dictates.

Thus, however progressive or transcendent his thoughts on intellectual matters,

on moral matters he remains at the level of a child who does something simply

because he is told to do so. He condescends to the women around him as “the

product of the system,” yet as he congratulates himself on his superiority, he

proves himself just as much a product as any one of them.

The women of the society are nevertheless unmistakably its products

and, most critics maintain, none more so than May Welland. May is one great

point of contention in the body of criticism surrounding The Age of Innocence,

and for good reason. No woman is sweeter or more apparently guileless than the

“young girl in white” who blushes at the Opera and tenderly admires the bou-

quet of flowers that her fiancée has sent her, yet no woman is more calculating

than the wife who tells her husband’s suspected mistress that she is pregnant in

order to get rid of her.

Both women, however, are May, and critics, at a loss as to how to

reconcile the two, frequently resort to choosing one or the other. Elizabeth Am-

mons, for example, sees May as child-woman bred specifically to protect the

patriarchy from independent females (“The War”). On the other hand, Linette

Davis and Judith Fryer see May as an incredibly savvy and powerful character

who not only possesses her own autonomy, but actually possesses more than

any other character in the novel. Davis, influenced by Luce Irigaray, goes so far as to suggest that May recognizes society’s schemes to rob her of her autonomy and “mimes” the helpless innocent in order to exercise covertly her considerable agency. Fryer, meanwhile, allows for such an interpretation by arguing that,
despite what the men of New York may think, it is actually the women who regulate their society.

In her argument, Fryer calls attention to the ritual nature of life in New York high society. Most good criticism of Age pays at least some attention to the frequent primitive, tribal imagery used in the novel to describe society. The most memorable example occurs in the Archers’ farewell dinner for Ellen, which is described as “the tribal rally around a kinswoman about to be eliminated from the tribe.”19 Newland himself repeats almost the exact same description in his own reflection on the event, when he understands “that, by means as yet unknown to him, the separation between himself and the partner of his guilt had been achieved, and that now the whole tribe had rallied about his wife on the tacit assumption that nobody knew anything, or had ever imagined anything, and that the occasion of the entertainment was simply May’s natural desire to take an affectionate leave of her friend and cousin.”20

There are two things of note in the passages just quoted. First is the notion of a purifying ritual carried out primarily by the women of the society. A large part of Fryer’s argument rests on the idea that the society by whose dictates Newland is obliged to live his life is a world created by women in order that women might have power and value apart from the men who seem to run the “real” world. In the “real” world, there are men like Lawrence Lefferts who, “as became the high priest of form...had formed a wife so completely to his own convenience that, in the most conspicuous moments of his frequent love affairs with other men’s wives, she went about in smiling unconsciousness, saying that ‘Lawrence was so frightfully strict.’”21 The antidote to the Lawrence Leffertses of the real world are women like his wife, but not in the way that Ammons would have it. Ammons argues that women like Gertrude Lefferts--make long dashand, she would maintain, May Welland--long dashare a creation by men for men so that they can carry on doing whatever they please. Fryer’s argument is that, on the contrary, the women of the society create what Newland calls a “hieroglyphic world”22 where nothing unpleasant about the “real” world is ever spoken aloud, so that women can have a place where they are not simply defined by their husbands’ actions, and so that they can protect the whole of society from what might happen if the men’s “real” lives were made public. Certain male indiscretions are sanctioned only on the condition that nobody be obliged to recognize them. It is only once “New York believed [Newland] to be Madame Olenska’s lover,” and Newland is on the verge of confessing to May his feelings for Ellen that something has to be done.23

That “something” is a dinner party, a decidedly feminine undertaking which involves May as well as both her mother and Newland’s, and from which Newland himself is conspicuously removed. He, in fact, attempts to object to the idea, but May overrides him with a quiet “I mean to do it, Newland,” and he submits.24 Furthermore, one of the most prominent figures at the dinner is the venerable Mrs. Van der Luyden, who symbolizes “the silent untriring activity

with which [Ellen’s] popularity had been retrieved, grievances against her silenced, her past countenanced, and her present irritated by the family approval” as she “shone on her with the dim benevolence which was her nearest approach to cordiality.”25 She also plays a crucial role in keeping Newland and Ellen separated after the dinner, summoning Ellen to sit beside her in the drawing room, and agreeing to drive “dear Ellen” home, rather than letting her be alone with Newland at her own carriage.26 The purifying ritual is complete; the threat has been expunged from their midst.

The second thing of note, besides the existence of the purifying ritual itself, is Newland’s inability to comprehend how it came about; the “means” of his separation from Ellen is “as yet unknown to him.”27 Comprehension, however, follows shortly, with May’s confession of her pregnancy and the fact that she confided in Ellen before she was certain of it. How anyone can continue to conceive of May as naive after this revelatory scene borders on the mystifying. She tells him that she is pregnant, that she is just that day sure of it, but that she also told Ellen about it when she had “a long talk” with her two weeks previously.28 When Newland asks how that can be possible when May has only recently become certain, her response is almost chilling, despite how warm her face looks: “Her color burnet deeper, but she held her gaze. ‘No; I wasn’t sure then--make long dash but I told her I was. And you see I was right!’”29 The blush that suffuses her face confesses her lie as readily as her words do, but she is not ashamed. What Newland recognized partially in the drawing room, in “May’s triumphant eyes,” he now understands in full.30 Not only has May successfully expelled her rival from society, but she now has a claim on Newland that she knows he will not break, and that, oddly enough, he foresaw when, in the moment that May announced her firm intention to give a farewell dinner for Ellen, he “suddenly saw before him the embodied image of the Family.”31 How he achieved this moment of prescience is not explained, but the manner of its occurrence is telling, and hearkens back to this essay’s original point about Newland Archer: he never manages to disentangle himself from the collectives, the forms that rule his life. Perhaps, had he ever realized May’s individuality, he might have taken his intuition out of the world of forms and seen his wife and the mother of his children, rather than a mere “embodied image.”

Many critics say that Newland’s problem is his inability to escape the dictates of society, but, to paraphrase Newland’s own words about May, “there [is] no use in trying to emancipate a [man] who [has] not the dimmest notion that [he is] not free.”32 In the beginning we saw that Newland considers himself superior to everybody and deigns to submit to society’s moral judgment ostensibly because he cannot be bothered to do otherwise. He is firmly convinced of his ability to transcend society, but, with the excuse that it would be “bad form,”

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19 Wharton., 200.
20 Ibid., 201.
21 Ibid., 29.
22 Ibid., 29.
23 Ibid., 203.
24 Ibid., 199.
he chooses not to do so. When he finally decides that he would like, even has the right to transgress, however, he finds he cannot. He has spent his entire life upholding the moral values of a system he could not be bothered to contradict; it is hardly surprising that, in a moment of crisis, he has no substance as a moral agent. Although Newland is trapped by the dictates of society, this is the case because he has chosen, and for the rest of his life will choose, to remain within the confines of his own mind which has been irrevocably shaped by the moral norms which he has always followed without ever making them his own.

Newland Archer is a perfect product of the system. May, too, is a product of the same system, but her function is different. Newland operates within the system and is given free reign as long as he does not disturb it. May is the operator. All the women, in fact, are the operators. Newland, in reflecting on his own youthful indiscretions, recalls the fact that “all the elderly ladies whom [he] knew regarded any woman who loved imprudently as necessarily unscrupulous and designing, and mere simple-minded man as powerless in her clutches. The only thing to do was to persuade him, as early as possible, to marry a nice girl, and then trust her to look after him.”

What he considers indulgently in the abstract is perceived as concrete reality by the women around him: that women have power in society that only women can regulate. Rituals repeat, refine, and regulate; they are done with purpose. The women in Age do nothing without a purpose.

The question then becomes one of consciousness: Are the women in New York society always conscious of the purpose they serve? In the case of Gertrude Lefferts, the answer seems to be no. Mrs. Welland, on the other hand, appears to have a very clear idea of her role, “as when [she], who knew exactly why Archer had pressed her to announce her daughter’s engagement at the Beaufort ball (and had indeed expected him to do no less), yet felt obliged to simulate reluctance, and the air of having had her hand forced.” Here we see not only Mrs Welland’s conscious cooperation with Newland’s behavior, but also definite expectations for it. May, the face of the next generation of female operators, inherits her mother’s role and ability, as is evidenced when Newland is able to expand her simple statement: “You must be sure to go and see Ellen” into a long, admonitory paragraph where she is telling him: “I know you mean to see Ellen when you are in Washington, and are perhaps going there expressly for that purpose; and … since you are sure to see her, I wish you to do so with my full and explicit approval.” More than anything, the women of this society know the value of silence; it is silence which gives their speech power.

May, however, does not always remain inside this silent world. She transgresses on at least two separate occasions, one being her decision to lie to Ellen about her pregnancy. The second is related to us—long dashon Newland—long dashon Newland—dashon Newland—dashon Newland in the final chapter by their son Dallas. While talking to his father about Ellen, Dallas asks if she was not “the woman [he’d] have chucked everything for.” Newland, in keeping with his generation’s mandate of silence on those things which were unpleasant or improper, has never spoken of his old connection with Ellen. May, however, on the day before she died, told her son that, “when she asked [him] to, [Newland had] given up the thing [he] most wanted.” The reference to Ellen, though indirect, is unmistakable.

“Dallas,” Newland observes, “belonged body and soul to the new generation.” The mark of this new generation is the breaking of that mandate of silence, as well as many of the old rules of propriety. Dallas is, after all, “marrying Beaufort’s bastard.” Newland accepts that fact with equanimity; what continues to discomfit him is the lack of silence. Perhaps May, were she still alive, would be shocked to learn of Dallas’ engagement; she is described, even in her latest years, as having “an incapacity to recognize change,” yet it is she who breaks the silence of her generation, while Newland remains incapable of escaping it. Newland, as ever, dwells in his mind, where his ideals are permitted to live on in spite of the world outside, and where Ellen is “more real” to him than if he were to meet her in person once more. May never had the luxury of living in her own mind. No matter her personal feelings, she had to deal with what happened in the world. For most of her life, she did so with a silence that both her husband and her children saw as an “invincible innocence,” but at the end of her life, she chose to speak. Dallas jests with his father: “You never told each other anything… I back your generation for knowing more about each other’s private thoughts than we ever have time to find out about our own;” the new age is not one of reticence, but of openness, and the last act attributed to May is a revelatory one, while Newland’s last act—long dash on Newland—long dash is one of solitary silence. Both are products of their age, but May recognizes that her age is at an end and acts accordingly because that was what she had always done, while Newland clings to the past because it is the only thing he can do. May is not only an agent, but also acutely conscious of her place as an agent in the world, and for this reason she, more than any other character, points beyond “the age of innocence,” into the new age.

33 Wharton., 61.
34 Ibid., 29.
35 Ibid., 161-162.
36 Ibid., 214.
37 Wharton., 214.
38 Ibid., 213.
39 Ibid., 211.
40 Ibid., 208.
41 Ibid., 217.
42 Ibid., 91.
43 Ibid., 214.
Perception
By Mara Borer

Soul.
   Freeze yourself.
Let the fleeting flecks of water on your shell,
Wrinkled castoffs from the orange metallic sprinkler,
Crystalize into gems of liquid Miracle.
Sun-flakes of gold leaf mold your cheeks
In a tan mask cracking with sweat.
   See,
The divinity of feeling the water-brown ground
Scrapping your soles in the hour before dusk;
The difficulty of sharpening a moment’s background
Into the cursive lines of a poet’s sketchbook.
   It slips.
   It slips.
The miracle shatters in a pattering prism
Stinging the nerves beneath your summer dress.

A Glimpse into a Realist Epistemology
By Jean-Paul Juge

The early twentieth century saw the rise of critical realism among neo-scholastic scholars. His particular epistemology championed a form of St. Thomas Aquinas’s realism that was adapted in response to the objections posed by idealist philosophers who followed the intellectual traditions of Descartes and Kant. Unfortunately, the neo-scholastics granted too much to their opponents by accepting their idealist method, and their own realism was susceptible to becoming practically indistinguishable from idealism. In his book, Methodical Realism, Thomist philosopher Étienne Gilson denounces the neo-scholastics for “borrowing from [idealism’s] very method of presenting the problem [of knowledge]” and thus “sooner or later… giving its adversary the victory.”

For Gilson, the failure of the neo-scholastics to respond to their idealist counterparts is not due to a flaw in realism, but to a deviation from realism’s essence, as will be explained later.

In order to deliver the full effect of Gilson’s thesis in Methodical Realism, this paper will be divided into two sections. The first part will provide a general outline and explanation of the realism one finds in the works of Aristotle and Aquinas, while the second half will be devoted to summarizing and promoting Gilson’s arguments, as found in Methodical Realism, against the possibility of a critical realism. These two treatments aim at adequately vindicating Gilson’s analysis that a proper realism takes being as its starting point, not thought; furthermore, any realism that adopts the idealist method loses its self-identity.

Aquinas’ Epistemology
A question that Gilson provides will assure that the following inquiry into human knowledge begins in the proper direction: “given the fact that there is knowledge, what must things be like to give us an explanation of the fact that we know them [?]” For Aristotle and Aquinas, all things that exist on their own are substances, each of which has an essence/nature. An essence is a substance’s interior principle of change and makes the substance what it is.

Socrates and Plato were both men and thus they shared the nature humanity. The nature of something is what is knowable/intelligible to the intellect; thus, the essence of a thing, apart from all individuating conditions, is the object of the intellect’s knowledge.

The soul knows the essences of things by considering substances universally through intelligible species.

Put simply, the intelligible species is “nothing but the intelligible…part of the object itself under another mode of existence.” The intelligible species is

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2 Ibid.
4 Aristotle, Physics II.
6 Ibid., 267.
an intermediary for knowledge which, “without ceasing to be the object…should yet be capable of becoming the subject.”7 As Yves Simon explains, “[t]he object of knowledge…has a dual existence. It exists, first, in nature, in the thing that has it as its own; and it exists, secondly, precisely as an object of cognition in the soul that knows it…This second existence…is, of course, an immaterial existence.”8 The latter mode of existence that Simon describes is the intelligible species. It is crucial to understand that, for Aquinas, the intelligible species is not what is known, but that by which something is known.9

How are intelligible species acquired? To answer this question one must delve into the origins of human knowledge. According to Aristotle, “the human intellect is like a tablet on which nothing is written,” and therefore, man does not begin life with innate ideas.10 All knowledge ultimately originates from sense experience, which is why Aquinas refers to it as being analogously the “material cause” of knowledge.11 Sense experience is not a sufficient condition for human knowledge, though it is necessary.

In the Metaphysics, Aristotle explains that “from sensation memory is produced” and that “several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience.”12 Following this idea, Aquinas believes that knowledge of an essence can only occur after one has sufficiently encountered multiple, particular instantiations of it through sensation. These sensations create what Aquinas calls phantasms, i.e. “material images” of the particular things sensed.13 Aquinas also says that it is impossible to understand something without making recourse to phantasms and imagination, as is evident from our own cognitive experience. This explains why the intellectual faculty is impaired if injury to the brain occurs.14

The philosopher-priest, Copleston, writes, “Although sensation is an activity of soul and body together, the rational and spiritual soul cannot be affected directly by a material thing or by the phantasm.”15 As Copleston goes on to explain, this means that the mind cannot be passive in acquiring knowledge. Thus, there must be an active principle in cognition. Aquinas distinguishes between the active intellect and the passive intellect. For Aquinas, these are two powers of the same human mind, not two separate intellects (though the case could be made that Aristotle thought differently on this matter).16 The active intellect “illuminates” the phantasms of the mind and, in doing so, accomplishes two things. First, it makes phantasms “more fit for the abstraction” of the intelligible species, and, second, the active intellect abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasms “by its own power.”17 Abstraction here refers to “considering the nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms.”18 Once this has occurred, the active intellect leaves an “impression” of the intelligible species it has abstracted upon the passive intellect.19 It is through this whole cognitive process that the intelligible species is formed and through it the nature of an existing thing is known.

This may seem to be an overly complicated epistemology, but it is necessary for holding a consistent, realist philosophy. One essential thing to keep in mind is that, unlike many contemporary philosophers, knowledge for Aquinas is not primarily “whether I’m awake right now” or “whether I’m really holding this paper in my hand”. The possibility for judging falsely or hallucinating in these situations does not jeopardize the potential for having genuine knowledge.

The object of the intellect is a “form [i.e. essence] existing individually in corporeal matter, but not as existing in this individual matter” (emphasis mine). This involves Aquinas’ distinction between common matter (e.g. flesh and bones) and designated matter (e.g. this flesh on these bones). Knowledge of a material essence includes the formal principle and the common matter but not the designated matter.20 It is because the universal, intelligible species is derived from sensation of individuals that knowledge is primarily and directly of universals and, only upon “turning to the phantasms” with the intelligible species in mind, is knowledge secondarily and indirectly of particulars.21

For Aristotle and Aquinas, knowledge is a union of knower and known. When the essence of a thing is known, the mind, being immaterial, becomes that essence. The essence does not exist in the mind in the same way it does in a material thing. Rather it exists in the mind intentionally (this is the immaterial existence Yves Simon spoke of above). While using the study of frogs as an example for the acquisition of knowledge, Jonathan Lear succinctly explains the above remarks: “To acquire psychological knowledge about froggy life, Aristotle’s mind must become frog soul. His mind must become the substance he was seeking to comprehend.”22 It might be better for our purposes here to say that Aristotle’s mind becomes “frog essence” as “frog soul” would only refer to the formal principle of life in the frog. However, knowledge of frog-ness would include the common matter of frog.

This view presents a radical intimacy between the knower and his object. This proximity of the two, which is so close as to, in a sense, dissolve into a unity, is the essence of realism. Simon says that, “the object introduced into the soul and the soul that has become the object are bound in the tightest of unisons in a single act of existing” (emphasis mine). Human knowledge is here uniquely honored among the physical. As Aquinas writes (and references Aristotle), “the passive intellect is ‘all things potentially’ and the active intellect is ‘all things in

7 Gilson., 266.
9 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 85, 2.
10 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 84, 3.
11 Ibid., I, 84, 6.
12 Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book A (I) 980a-981a.
13 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 85, 1.
14 Ibid., I, 4, 7.
16 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, 84, 4.
17 Ibid., I, 85, 1.
18 Aquinas, I.85.1.
19 Copleston, 110.
20 Aquinas, I, 85, 1.
21 Aquinas, I, 86, 1.
23 Simon,13.
act.”24 Lear goes on to illustrate how this privilege of the human intellect is a generous one: “The mind that is actively thinking what it is to be a frog is, otherwise described, frog form thinking itself.”25 Furthermore, “When S is an essence or form, the understanding of S is just S itself at its highest level of actuality.”26 As was already said, the human mind is unparalleled among material creation. But, essential to its greatness is its capacity to share its actualizing by familiarizing the potential of other creatures to exist and in an immortal way. Though Simon would maintain that knowledge is only for the benefit of the knower and does not affect the object of knowledge,27 Lear goes so far as to say that, when the human mind is contemplating an essence, that essence exists in the mind at a higher level of actuality than it could have if it were instantiated in the material world (with the exception of contemplating humanity itself).28

**Methodical Realism**

In *Methodical Realism*, Gilson engages himself in a critique of the neo-scholastic philosophers who, brandishing their critical realism, fail to adequately respond to their idealist opponents because both their own system and that of the idealists claim that “philosophical reflection ought necessarily to go from thought to things.”29 The idealism that the neo-scholastics sought to counter took its origin from Descartes who “decided that the mathematical method must…be the method for metaphysics.”30 Idealism here understood is a philosophy that begins with the thought of the human mind and limits reality’s existence to the extent that it is known. Critical realism, on the other hand, is an effort to (either intentionally or unintentionally) revise the realism of Aquinas in order to address several of the philosophical problems that have followed in Descartes’ wake. It is crucial to emphasize here that one way in which the neo-scholastics altered Aquinas’ realism was by making its point of initial departure the same as Descartes’: the thought of the human mind.

The first certainty of Descartes’ philosophical reflection was “Cogito, ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”), and all certainties could only follow from this starting point. As Gilson says, the *Cogito* is not itself problematic; it can be found in some form in the works of St. Augustine (though he did not utilize it the same way Descartes did).31 The real problem lies in beginning with the *Cogito* and using this epistemological certainty to prove external reality and create one’s metaphysics. Though some may desperately try to exit the mental prison they created for themselves in an effort to contact reality, “he who begins as an idealist ends as an idealist,” and this is precisely what happened to some of the neo-scholastic philosophers.32

The realism of medieval scholars like Aquinas, which was discussed in the first section, did not endeavor to prove the existence of the outside world because the need to do so never occurred to these earlier thinkers. Philosophy for Aquinas began with ontology, i.e. metaphysics, in which it was assumed that beings were taken to exist independent of human knowledge of them. This is why Gilson argues that “[n]eo-scholastic realism,” in its attempt to refute idealism, “is committed to finding in a particular doctrine [realism] the solution to a problem which that doctrine had no suspicion existed.”33 To read in the works of Aquinas an embedded argument for extra-mental reality is simply to misread him. Unlike the medieval scholastic philosophers, the critical realism of the neo-scholastics, just like idealism, begins with epistemology. Gilson proposes a return to the approach of the medievals: “epistemology, instead of being the pre-condition for ontology, should grow in it and with it…helping to uphold, and itself upheld by, ontology.”34 Only insofar as realism acknowledges reality apart from a logical analysis of thought can it truly be realism.

Gilson identifies two types of critical realism: mediate and immediate. Gilson presents the first, *mediate realism*, from the perspective of the writings of Cardinal Mercier. In his writing, Mercier applies the principle of causality in an effort to vindicate our “inner and direct conviction that the exterior world exists.”35 For Cardinal Mercier, the extra-mental world is perceived directly and immediately, but one can only be certain of it indirectly and meditately: through reasoning. Acknowledging that consciousness is passive to sensation, Mercier concludes that our sensations are contingent. It is here that Mercier applies the principle of causality to infer that something must be the cause of these contingent sensations, and it cannot be our own intellect because, as was said, our mind is passive to sensation. Thus, Mercier believes he can be certain of extra-mental reality. Such reasoning is very similar to Descartes’ *Sixth Meditation*, as the principle of causality is likewise employed there in an attempt to prove a world exists independent of the mind.36

The representative Gilson provides for the second type of critical realism, *immediate realism*, is Monsignor Noël. Noël does not think there is any need to appeal to the principle of causality, as Mercier did. Rather, Noël believes extra-mental reality is directly given to us in experience. Acknowledging different layers to reality, Noël considers “the apprehended reality,” but *qua* “the apprehended” and apart from its reality.37 Gilson denies that Noël introduces idealism into Thomism, but he does say that, “treat[ing] what is apprehended as separate from reality, even if only as part of a methodological device, is to do the opposite of what Saint Thomas always did.”38 Noël’s approach is largely misleading, as “the first object of the intellect…is…something entirely different from ‘an apprehended’ without the reality; it is reality itself.”39 To fail to address this is to fail to provide an accurate account of knowledge.40 The fault in idealism is not that it is inconsistent; it is perfectly consistent. Its fault is, rather, that “the complexity of reality could in no way inconvenience

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24 Aquinas, I, 88, 1.
25 Lear, 131.
26 Ibid.
27 Simon, 13.
28 Lear, 132.
29 Gilson, 11.
30 Ibid.
31 Gilson, 15.
32 Ibid., 14.
33 Gilson, 18.
34 Gilson, 25.
35 Ibid., 29.
36 Ibid., 38.
37 Gilson, 49.
38 Ibid., 52.
39 Ibid., 54.
In trying to apply idealism to aspects of reality, like causation and the existence of extra-mental things, numerous difficulties accumulate, and it becomes “time to look for simpler theories and give them preference.” Taking the mathematical method of Descartes and applying it to all aspects of reality, idealism “assumes that a particular method can be autonomous and all-sufficient” and excludes anything it encounters that does not fit into its system. For realism, “reality is what dictates the method, and not the method which defines reality.”

Gilson calls for a true realism that, unlike critical realism, does not “compromise with idealism,” and which takes “that things exist…for its starting point.”

The methodical realism that Gilson proposes is in concord with common sense, as it takes that there is a world outside of our minds that is knowable to be a given fact; such was the realism presented in the first half of this paper. Gilson illustrates the exodus away from realism that occurred in the history of philosophy:

With a sure instinct as to what was the right way, the Greeks firmly entered on the realist path and the scholastics stayed on it because it led somewhere. Descartes tried the other path, and when he set out on it there was no obvious reason not to do so. But we realize today that is leads nowhere, and that is why it is our duty to abandon it.

To return to realism is simply to return to what is natural to man. Critical realism deviates from realism insofar as it deviates from common experience. To allow for knowledge of the essentials of really existing things, which are themselves inexhaustible fonts of intelligibility that make contact with and, in a sense, unite one’s soul with an extra-mental world, is the mark of realism.

Fascist kiss that flickers into a political abyss.
The crumbling crust of your consciousness that I peel off with a glance.
Will you let tyrants turn you into a museum or a hydrogen bomb?
Let yourself noun into a verb through unnecessary Adjectives.
Dissonant choices trickle through sieves, would you, for the gods’ sakes, let them live.
Emulation implying dogmatism, though you and I hate nomenclature for different reasons.
Facti sumus into rational automatons; the climb means breaking some limbs.
The Red Vote: Deriving 2020 Vision from 2016
By Elisa G. Ron

The young and their elders clash over a variety of topics, and politics is no exception. According to Gallup in 2016, 55% of Americans under thirty reported a positive opinion of socialism, compared to only 24-37% of older Americans. This trend persists long after the chaotic drama of the 2016 presidential election: as of September 2017, Democratic Socialists of America’s membership has “quadrupled [in size] since the election,” and its average age has more than halved, in part due to young Americans’ increasing embrace of its ideals. Because of the Millennial Generation’s growing influence, we must decipher the roots of their 2016 preferences in order to derive a speculative vision of the 2020 electorate and, by extension, of the United States’ destiny as a constitutional republic.

Before we continue, we must define the essential terms. Democratic socialism denotes the belief that “both the economy and society should be run democratically” to meet human needs rather than to generate profit. Socialism, as defined by the late economist Robert Heilbroner, is essentially government-controlled collective ownership of the means of production. There is some disagreement over the exact range of years that span the Millennial Generation, but demographers Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of Generations and Millennials Rising, define the range roughly between 1982 and 2004.

Some contend that “democratic” socialism is distinct from Soviet socialism because democracy disperses power amongst the multitude rather than centralizing it in a singular tyrant. However, democracy often degenerates directly into tyranny, which defeats the purpose of differentiating democratic and Soviet socialism. Plato eloquently shows this metamorphosis in Book VIII of The Republic. Socrates argues that democracy emerges from oligarchy as a result of the poor “frightening [the rich] into exile” and then establishing “an equal share in ruling” among those who remain. Anarchy results, necessitating the rise of tyranny to reestablish control. This closely resembles the bourgeoisie’s violent overthrow and “dictatorship of the proletariat” as Marx and Engels famously describe in their Communist Manifesto. Therefore, for these purposes, “democratic socialism” and “socialism” will be used interchangeably.

The Millennial Generation’s socialist sympathies (voted on }en masse} in 2016) largely derive from two causes. First, Millennials are frustrated with post-Recession economic hardship. Harvard Institute of Politics found in their Youth Poll this past summer that 59% of them are “worried” about the American economy. This is no surprise considering the Recession’s aftermath. They are the first generation in modern times to struggle with “higher levels of student loan debt, poverty, and unemployment” compared to preceding generations at the same age, and their starting wages have stagnated since the Recession began. While Millennials struggled to survive, Wall Street financiers received preferential treatment: for example, according to a limited GAO audit in 2011, the Federal Reserve secretly loaned them $16 trillion during the financial crisis. Young Americans—now conflating capitalism with cronyism—developed a visceral distaste for capitalism and voted accordingly. According to The New York Times, youth voter turnout in 2008 reached a 36-year high, and they preferred President Obama to John McCain 66% to 31%. When their economic situation remained stagnant, Millennials shifted their ideology further left. As a result, democratic socialist Bernie Sanders won as much as 71% of the youth vote in the 2016 primaries, breaking President Obama’s record and beating Hillary Clinton by a stunning 43-point margin. Despite his ultimate defeat in the Democratic primary, Sanders’ popularity persists today: a Harvard-Harris poll from this past August shows that he is America’s most popular politician, with 54% reporting a “favorable or very favorable” opinion of him. More importantly for 2020, Sanders’ popularity also eclipses that of President Trump, whose presidential disapproval rating is around 55-57%. When economic hardship abounds—as it has for Millennials since the Recession—democratic socialism’s appeal to justice becomes irresistible.

The second major reason why many Millennials flocked towards socialism in 2016 is their relative unfamiliarity with socialism’s past errors compared with older Americans. Because they have no first-hand memories of the Cold War, Millennials are less likely to associate socialism with the tyrannical, bloodthirsty Soviet Union that had put socialist ideals into practice. For them,
socialism is the secret behind the success of countries like Denmark, which “seems to violate the laws of the economic universe” by providing extensive benefits while retaining prosperity. The Cold War is now the victim of its own success: Millennials have lukewarm incentive—if any—to actually understand socialism because it does not seriously threaten them. This might explain why a 2014 Reason Foundation survey found that only 16% of Millennials could correctly define “socialism,” or why only 9% of Millennials reported that they would not support a “democratic socialist,” according to Harvard Institute of Politics in 2015. With this year marking the centennial of the Russian Revolution that birthed the Soviet Union into being, one can only wonder whether these findings point towards a tragic repetition of history in the coming decades.

Democratic socialism presents additional challenges for Catholics concerned for the poor because its altruistic message seems extraordinarily compatible with Catholic social doctrine. Socialist International, for example, proudly declares their commitment to “freedom, social justice and solidarity,” as does the Church. However, socialism is incompatible with Catholicism because socialism relies on morally illicit means to attain illegitimate ends. The Catechism contends that “authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it.” Both of these criteria are intrinsically absent in socialist regimes because they disregard human dignity—since they do not recognize individuality—and because they rely on violent coercion to attain their goals. Marx and Engels make these connections themselves in their Manifesto: for them, the abolition of individuality is “undoubtedly aimed at” because it is an obstacle to creating a collectivist society. Regarding violent coercion, they unabashedly declare that the revolution requisite for establishing a socialist system “can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions” and the annihilation of anyone who dares to dissent with their vision.

Socialism also conflicts with Catholicism because it distorts the meaning of “social justice.” According to noted Catholic philosopher Michael Novak, although this term originally referred to “the capacity to organize with others to accomplish ends that benefit the whole community,” Progressive-Era intellectuals redefined it to mean “uniform state distribution of society’s advantages and disadvantages” in order to heighten their ideology’s appeal to Catholics concerned for the destitute. When we read Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, however, we find that this violation of property rights contradicts Catholic social doctrine. Although he agrees that there exists an unjustified excess of “misery and wretchedness,” he also contends that eliminating private property would be “emphatically unjust,” because it would rob the lawful possessor of the fruits of his individual labor and “distort the functions of the state,” among other hazards. Nevertheless, socialism’s appeal to redistributive justice persists among well-meaning Catholics because—as Karl Marx himself asserts in the Manifesto—“Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge.”

While the above discourse may seem like little more than an esoteric puzzle for academics, there are three reasons why such analysis matters in a more practical sense.

First, socialism tends to worsen the same economic corruption and inequality it claims to eradicate because its centralized structure allows the state to grant special treatment to the well connected. Venezuela is the most extreme example: common citizens live in abject poverty while billionaire elites live in abundant luxury. Thanks to Chavez and Maduro, these lucky elect enjoy access to extra dollars denied to the multitude. Corruption is also commonplace, as developments this past July—including Maduro’s illegal attempts to rewrite the constitution and rig the election in his regime’s favor—vividly demonstrate. While it is understandable why Millennials would turn to democratic socialism as succor from pervasive economic suffering, its side effects are even worse than the disease itself.

Secondly, socialist regimes necessarily undermine individual rights because socialism derives these rights from the State. As French philosopher Frédéric Bastiat writes in The Law, socialist rulers see themselves as omnipotent substitutes for a Creator and consider basic rights “fatal gifts” which threaten the citizenry. Since their authority eclipses that of any higher power, socialist rulers must control these rights for the greater good. This should concern Millennials regardless of spiritual persuasion because it grants superhuman power to human rulers who can enslave citizens just as easily as they can empower them. To parody Job, what the State gives, the State can also take away.

Most important of all, the ideology of the youth represents a sketch of America’s future. Pew Research Center in April 2016 declared Millennials “the nation’s largest living generation,” which will reach a peak of 81.1 million

23 Ibid. 44.
26 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The Communist Manifesto, 33.
in twenty years,\textsuperscript{32} They will soon be the electorate’s “single largest cohort,” according to The Brookings Institution,\textsuperscript{33} making recent reports suggesting a second Sanders presidential run in 2020 especially relevant.\textsuperscript{34} Even if Sanders doesn’t run for president again, his principles will likely still influence the candidates who do run. It has happened before: “Hillary Clinton [became] Bernie Sanders-lite” to try to attract voters from his base for the 2016 general election.\textsuperscript{35} Regardless of who runs in 2020, the expanding millennial faction makes democratic socialism a movement of consequence that demands serious attention in the years to come.

We should not disregard the views of Millennial voters simply because they are young. They are a demographic with an admirably shrewd and idealistic spirit despite their youth. However, if they are to responsibly exercise their influence in 2020 and beyond, they must seek to understand the consequences of whatever ideology they espouse—democratic socialist or otherwise—and determine whether its theoretical benefits outweigh the empirical risks.

\textsuperscript{34} Amie Parnes, “Sanders keeping door open on 2020.” The Hill. July 23, 2017
\textsuperscript{35} Ed Rogers, A 2020 Democratic agenda is emerging. September 4, 2017.
Facing the Wall
By Declan Hamilton

Far beneath the surface, where the sun’s rays shine
there’s a little stone walkway and a stone bench
you can find.
It’s made of fake marble and faces a concrete wall
With people standing front and back awaiting their trains call
Some go east, and many go west
But he sits staring at the wall, wondering how he failed that test
(the test that all men everywhere, at some point have to face)
While the trains speed onwards picking up their pace…
He had thought that he was special like a legend in old books
but legends like their carriers grow forgotten in old nooks.
As the people moved onwards leaving bits of themselves behind
He ran his fingers on the stone, but no answer could he find
The groaning, thumping, banging of the trains upon the tracks
Granted him momentary solitude from his mind’s attacks
But as the engines pumped again
And they pulled away from him
He was left there staring at the wall - of his ever present sin

Flight
Eve Low
Photograph
2017
Genesis and the Origin of Evil in Nature
By Margaret Schuhriemen

In the wake of Darwin, much has been said about the Genesis creation story and evolution. While many Christians today have been reconciled to the idea that Genesis cannot be interpreted as a historical or scientific work, Cardinal Ratzinger in his work In the Beginning notes that “[t]here is almost ineluctable fear that (…) the whole landscape of Scripture and of the faith will be overrun by a kind of ‘reason that will no longer be able to take any of [Genesis or Scripture] seriously.’”1 Ratzinger points to a significant problem in the way the book of Genesis is viewed today, since much of our discussion of Genesis is aimed at convincing the world of what Genesis is not saying, rather than what it is saying. Ratzinger seeks to reclaim the depth and beauty of Genesis and a renewal in the belief that the true meaning of Genesis has never changed. In this paper, I will take up Ratzinger’s challenge and explore the enduring truths that Genesis teaches, specifically about the origin of natural evil. Read literally, Genesis tells us that all death, decay, and suffering in nature is a direct result of the Fall. How then is this teaching compatible with the evolutionary evidence that natural disasters, mutation, and death necessarily occurred for millions of years before humans even existed? The dilemma has convinced many atheists that a good God cannot exist and conversely has caused many educated Christians to staunchly reject the theory of evolution. While evil perpetuated by human beings—moral evil—can be explained by free will, the brutality of evolution appears completely separate and distinct from human beings. By moral evil, I mean evil that is the direct result of personal sin; natural evil is the corruption, death, and pain present in nature which is separate from human beings. Genesis cannot be read scientifically or historically; however, it teaches fundamental truths, not only concerning human beings and salvation, but also about the origin and meaning of the physical world. First, I will look at what a traditional exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis teaches about the natural world in light of evolution and then propose several theories about how Genesis 1 and 3 best explain the origin and meaning of evil in nature.

The fundamental teaching of the first creation story is that God created order out of chaos. God looked out into primordial darkness and commanded the creation of light. The Jerome Biblical Commentary notes that here, God “bridges the chasm” between Himself and the void.2 The God of Genesis 1 is a God who distinguishes, categorizes, and orders, forming His world into a specific, discernable design. Dr. Leon Kass comments on a remarkable pattern in the seven days of creation. God separates and distinguishes the “formless wasteland” into an intelligible and good world.

Further, most biblical scholars today believe that the first creation account was written as a reaction against the Enuma Elish and other Babylonian creation stories which depict a violent world formed out of battles among the

between God and humankind. (...) It fulfills its purpose and assumes its significance when it is lived, ever new, with a view to worship. (...) The true center, the power that moves and shapes from within in the rhythm of the stars and of our lives, is worship.8

The world as it was created is meant to direct man back to praise his Creator. This is true regardless of the process by which the world was formed. The Sabbath, which will not be introduced until the Exodus by Moses, is a sign that God has bound himself forever to man and to the world. Properly seen, nature should guide man to the Sabbath—to a bond with God. When man rejects his relationship with God in Genesis 3, it also distorts his relationship with nature. Man was once given “dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”9 The Fall caused man to exploit nature by becoming obsessed with his work rather than the Sabbath rest.10 Perhaps then, the so-called evil that modern man sees in nature was not brought on by the Fall but is a result of his distorted view of the order and plan of God. Blinded by his improper relationship with nature and God, man cannot fully understand God’s purpose for creating nature the way He did. The author of Genesis, writing to fallen man, assures mankind that nature and man were made for God.

Although man on his own cannot come to a full appreciation of the divine plan for the physical world, human beings are capable of coming to some knowledge of His purpose. Genesis 1 declares that the world is ordered, is good, and is made for God, but how can this be reconciled with the apparent cruelty of nature? How can birth defects, earthquakes, or carnivores like orca whales, which torture their prey for hours before killing them, be part of a loving divine plan? The apparent incongruity between a good God and the cruelty of nature is deeply troubling for many believers and unbelievers today. Many Christians such as Dr. Terry Mortenson have argued that the two cannot be reconciled and that believers must deny evolution, but even rejecting evolution does not solve the problem of evil in nature.11 Conversely, in his book Darwin’s Gift, Francisco Ayala argues that evolution solves the dilemma, since God did not directly cause the evils in the world but rather set up a natural process that through trial and error culminated in the creation of man.12 Ayala’s solution, however, borders on deism. I believe that the evidence for evolution is undeniable and that it is compatible with a traditional interpretation of Genesis. I will examine three possible theories that help explain how the creation story in Genesis deals with these apparently irreconcilable ideas.

The first of these theories is that the fragility and temporality of the physical world could have been beneficial even for pre-fallen man. Even though the Genesis creation narrative should not be construed as a historical text, the existence of some degree of suffering before the Fall is not incompatible with

Creation is oriented to the Sabbath, which is the sign of the covenant

4 Kass, The Beginning of Wisdom, 44.
8 Ratzinger, In The Beginning, 28.
9 Gn 1:26, New American Bible.
10 Ratzinger, In The Beginning, 33-35.

34 35
the text of Genesis 1 and 3. When the woman is punished in Genesis 3:16, she is told, “I will intensify your pangs of your child bearing,” which seems to suggest that there was some pain before the Fall. Furthermore, while man is told that if he disobeys God he will die, there is no indication that animals did not die before the fall of man. The command to animals to be fruitful and multiply indirectly suggests that animals did in fact die before the fall, and nothing in the punishment of man and woman afterwards, nor the description of paradise before, indicates the Fall changed the nature of animals. These considerations led Thomas Aquinas to conclude: “For the nature of animals was not changed by man’s sin, as if those whose nature now it is to devour the flesh of others, would then have lived on herbs, as the lion and falcon.” Aquinas believed that carnivores may have been commanded not to eat meat before the Fall, but their nature was not changed by the Fall. Moreover, nature as a whole in Genesis 1 is not opposed to change. This is confirmed in Genesis 1:24 when the earth is granted some creative power, albeit through the power of God: “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures.’” Life before the Fall was not stagnant; the material world generated and corrupted, and this was called good. After the creative works of each day, God calls what He has created good. According to Denis Lamoureux, the word *tob* translated as “good” in Genesis 1 means that it is “functioning properly” or that it is suited for human beings to live. This pattern is notably interrupted, however, on the sixth day. God never calls man good. Kass argues that “man is not good—not determinate, finished, complete, or perfect. It remains to be seen whether man will become good, whether he will be able to complete himself (or allow himself to be completed).” Even before the Fall then, the temporality of the earth may have been intended to direct man to God. These considerations lead to the second and related theory. By creating a material world, God necessarily created a world that was not as perfect and unchanging as Himself. Modern science tells us that generation and corruption are inherent in the concept of matter. There is also some evidence for this idea in Genesis 1, although the Genesis author was clearly not preempts modern science. When God orders the earth to bring forth plants, the earth’s action does not perfectly correspond to His command. As Kass notes, “God asks the earth to ‘grass grass’, but the earth instead ‘put forth’ [*tose*] grass (1:11–12)—leading rabbis long ago to remark that the earth was the first in disobedience.” It is difficult to say with certainty why the inspired author includes this, but it could indicate that the earth, unlike light, which at the time Genesis was written was thought of as the purest substance in the material world, cannot as perfectly imitate the divine pattern. The earth, by virtue of its being a less pure material substance, cannot be as perfect and unchangeable as the divine. If we follow Aquinas’ reasoning and believe that animal nature was not changed after the Fall, then the natural world is good in that it is functioning in the way it ought to and must. In Lamoureux’s words, “predation is not a natural evil because it carries no moral status. Instead, animals preying on others can be viewed as a functional component in a properly working biosphere.”

The Genesis creation story may allow for generation and corruption, but it cannot be denied that it depicts a more perfect world than the post-fallen one. In his book *Beginnings: Genesis and Modern Science*, Cannon Charles Hauret contends that “[t]he Scriptures describe things in this way to bring out for us the idea of the perfect happiness of our first parents. (...) [T]he description does not do justice to the reality.” The author of Genesis is attempting to describe to fallen man a state of happiness and innocence that is unimaginable to him. In doing this he describes a state of physical paradise to express how good the world was without sin.

Lastly, the theology of the origin of evil in Genesis must be understood in light of the New Testament. The third chapter of Genesis introduces the relationship between sin and suffering—and ultimately redemptive suffering—that will be developed throughout the Old Testament and only fulfilled in the New Testament. Even up to the New Testament, the Israelites had a strong sense of retributive justice. According to William Heidt, “Our Yahwist tradition uses this theology. If there is suffering and pain, it must be associated with sin.” The notion that suffering might arise distinct from one’s sins and have yet another purpose is gradually developed particularly in Isaiah, Job, and Hosea, in which God teaches His people that suffering, even if it is not directly caused by sin, can bring about salvation. Similarly, Lamoureux proposes that the different authors of Genesis 1 and 3 differed on whether or not evil in the natural world was the direct result of sin. Heidt continues by saying

The Old Testament has “prepared” for the New Testament, not so much by a series of isolated predictions as through the creation of a mentality that understood (…) the abiding Presence of his maker who would condescend to use pain and suffering itself in an infinitely great purgative and redemptive process from paradise to the parousia.

Christ later broadened our understanding of the cause of evil in Luke 13:1-4, when He explained that the eighteen people killed when a tower fell were no more sinful than the other inhabitants of Jerusalem. Again, in John 9, He tells His disciples that the man was not born blind either because he sinned or his parents sinned, but so that “the works of God might be made visible.

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13 Gn 3: 16, *NAB*.
19 Ibid. 39.
20 Ibid. 49.
21 Lamoureux, “Beyond the Cosmic Fall,” 51.
24 Lamoureux, “Beyond the Cosmic Fall,” 51.
26 Lk 14:1-4, *NAB*. 
through him. Ultimately, Jesus will demonstrate this through His passion and death. As David Fergusson explains, “Creation can only be understood from the perspective of redemption. There is too much wastage, pain and untimely death to make this view possible apart from a particular conviction about the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection”. The etiology of evil given in Genesis 1 and 3 cannot be taken as the Bible’s definitive teaching on this question; rather, these chapters, even those containing evils that otherwise seem incomprehensible and cruel, are part of the process that allowed the Israelites and all people since to come to God. Ratzinger stresses this point: “Therefore we read the law, like the creation account, with him; and from him (and not from some subsequently discovered trick) we know what God wished over the course of centuries to have gradually penetrated the human heart and soul.” Ratzinger continues to say that only at the beginning of the Gospel of John is a definitive account of creation given. In light of the New Testament, it becomes clear that all suffering, whether human or not, is ultimately directed to salvation because it reorients nature and man back to the worship of God.

The problem of evil in nature will never be completely answered in this life, but the first chapters of Genesis should be an aid rather than a stumbling block. While it is difficult to understand some passages in the Genesis account, read in the context of the time in which it was written and within the Biblical narrative as a whole, it teaches eternal truths about mankind and the natural world. The depth of meaning in the Genesis creation account cannot be reduced to a brief “Don’t worry. It’s not literal.” It must be recognized as an essential part of Sacred Scripture, which is “useful for teaching.” Ratzinger emphasized to Catholics living in a world obsessed with the literal scientific meaning that the Church is not retreating when it interprets scripture non-scientifically; rather, it is reading Genesis in the way it was originally intended to be read.

27 Jn 9:1-5, NAB.
29 Ratzinger, In the Beginning, 16.
30 Ratzinger, 15.
31 2 Tim 3:16, NAB.
The Moviegoer is the story of Binx Bolling’s search for himself. Early in the novel, in a flashback to the time in his childhood when his Aunt Emily broke the news to him of his older brother Scotty’s death, he is told he must “act like a soldier,” to which he responds, internally, “I could easily act like a soldier. Was that all I had to do?” This is the central question of the novel. Binx is presented with various ways of acting in life, various roles he might play, from the aristocratic Southern-gentility tradition embodied in his Aunt Emily to the characters he sees in movies and television—sly businessmen, charming seducers, gallant heroes—but is life only acting out a role? Binx seems convinced that there is more to it than that, and he is intent on finding out what.

The novel does not, however, end with Binx declaring his complete independence from societal convention and embarking out on life’s journey a self-creating lone individual. Rather, he marries his clinically depressed cousin Kate Cutrer, goes to medical school according to his Aunt Emily’s wishes, and helps his mother take care of her children, his half-siblings. In the end he assumes certain roles in life—devoted husband, obedient nephew, helpful son—that before had seemed to him soul-crushing, since they were roles that anyone could play and so couldn’t be the manifestation of who he is as a person.

Is this novel then a tragedy? Has Binx abandoned the search and let himself become just another cog in society’s impersonal machinery? Most critics seem to think not. Martin Luschei, for one, argues that Binx’s final decision is not inconsistent because, although he accepts the “outward form” of Aunt Emily’s ideals for him, the more important “inner content,” his decision to marry Kate, is his own. In Luschei’s reading, Binx’s success comes from his recognizing his own radical freedom in conforming to society.

This existentialist reading is one successful way of defending Binx’s choice, but the title of the novel is not Radical Freedom. Yes, Percy was heavily influenced by existentialist philosophers, but he titled his novel The Moviegoer, and it is relative to this theme, moviegoing, and not existentialism, that I wish to try to answer the following question: How is Binx’s final decision to attend medical school, marry Kate, and help take care of his family—more broadly, his resolve to try to find a way to “stick [himself] into the world”—how is this decision the result of a successful search for authenticity? That is, how is acting out an assigned, non-unique role in life consistent with being one’s unique, individual self?

As a starting point, we can take a comment Simone Vauthier makes in her analysis of the novel’s title. She claims that “the word [‘moviegoer’] itself . . . balances the indefinite reality, insubstantial but accessible to all, of the screen world against the private experience of the individual who goes to the cinema.” The image of moviegoing establishes these two disparate realms—the screen world, or what I will call the world of art (specifically public, fictional art), which is “insubstantial but accessible to all,” and the world of “the private experience of the individual,” which I will simply call the real world, or real life—and it is within this language that I will frame the novel’s ending and make sense of it. For most of the rest of this paper I will trace Binx’s changing attitude toward moviegoing—both literal and figurative—that is, his changing attitude toward the relationship between life and art.

Before proceeding, we should consider briefly the nature of this divide between life and art. In Vauthier’s words, the art world is “insubstantial but accessible to all.” This phrase implies two distinctions. The first is logical: the art world is fictional while real life is nonfictional. That is, things that happen in movies have no logical implications for reality, whereas things in life do. For example, one can have a conversation with Harrison Ford, but not with Indiana Jones. Indiana Jones is “insubstantial,” in that, underneath the on-screen presence, there is no person of Indiana Jones. There is, however, a person of Harrison Ford, one that is not fully present on the screen. The second distinction is one of scope. The art world is “accessible to all.” Movies are public art, so their audience is necessarily universal. Life, on the other hand, being experienced, is strictly limited to the world immediately surrounding the one doing the experiencing. It is private.

I am not the first critic to look at moviegoing as a theme in The Moviegoer. Lewis A. Lawson, in his essay “Moviegoing in The Moviegoer,” a reading of Binx’s moviegoing primarily as a vehicle for Percy’s existentialist philosophy, claims that “moviegoing characterizes the alienated man’s fascinated gaze at a distant reality.” A similar characterization, but framed within a Cartesian rather than an existentialist philosophy, appears in Woods Nash’s essay “The Moviegoer’s Cartesian Theater.” Nash argues that Binx “allows his thoughts of movies to stand between himself and the world, just as, for Descartes, mental objects stand like a screen between the self and the nonmental world.” In both these readings, moviegoing is made out to be a mediator between Binx and reality, to distance him from his own experience.

These readings are good, and well-supported by evidence, but it is important to note that this view of Binx’s moviegoing, so thoroughly considered by previous critics, as a mediation or distance between Binx and reality, is insufficient. Moviegoing as an image does much more work than this in the novel. In a movie theater, there is more than just the screen and a single moviegoer and the relationship between the two. There are also other moviegoers, the box office clerks, the theater managers, the appearance and location of the movie theater itself, and even the actors, who, while appearing on screen, have off-screen lives. All of these are present in the novel, and not only present, but prominent. When

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3 Percy, MG, 233.
Binx goes to the movies, he often describes not only the action in the movie, but also the circumstances of his watching it, including his relationship both to those around him and to the actors on the screen.

One aspect of Binx’s relationships with others is that he tends to conflate the art world and the real world, treating real, experienced life, untouched by anything cinematic, as if it were a movie, and treating real people as if they were characters. Over the course of the week during which the novel takes place, Binx refers to twelve movies by name and to several others by description, and for each one he offers a concise, definitive summary that has a feeling of completeness. This type of summary is not unlike what one might read on a DVD cover or in a Netflix movie description. It’s the normal way to summarize a movie. But one way in which Binx treats real life as if it were a movie is to use this same method of summary on real people, and not only on people he knows, whose characters and personalities he might actually be able to summarize fairly accurately, but on people he’s never met. On one occasion early in the novel when he sees a young man and woman walking down the street, “it takes [him] two seconds to size up the couple. They are twenty, twenty-one, and on their honeymoon. Not Southern. Probably Northeast. . . .” This is how Binx sees most people, as types. His summaries of people are confident, complete, and reductive.

Yet when anyone around him does something similar, summarizing the existences of other human beings in what pretend to be exhaustive descriptions, Binx shows contempt. He describes his Aunt Emily’s tendency to give such an overconfident narration of life thus: “All the stray bits and pieces of the past, all that is feckless and gray about people, she pulls together into an unmistakable visage of the heroic or the craven, the noble or the ignoble.” Of his mother he claims that “she had a way of summing up [my father’s] doings in a phrase that took the heart out of him,” and later that “her recollection of my father is stilled and of a piece. It is not him she remembers but an old emblem of him.” Binx accuses his aunt and mother of subsuming everything around them into their narrative at the expense of the authentic reality of those things. Whatever this authentic reality is, whatever it is in a person that resists description, that dies when a person is summarized, it stands beneath his appearance and cannot be directly observed. It is, in the literal sense of the word, the substance of the person, and cannot be represented in the “insubstantial” world of art. It is what Harrison Ford loses when he becomes Indiana Jones. That Binx shows such contempt for other people’s summary judgments of character, and yet that he himself makes these same judgments constantly, is evidence of an inconsistency in his own character, one that he has to overcome, and will overcome by the end of the novel.

What makes it so hard for Binx’s mother to let go of the emblem she has of his late father? And what makes it so hard for Aunt Emily to confront the world as it is, to behold “all that is feckless and gray about people” without having to sculpt it into “an unmistakable visage”? The answer lies in the fact that both of these metaphorical actions, sculpting and emblem-making, are artistic. Aunt Emily and Binx’s mother each create an image of their world. But an artist does not create ex nihilo, he creates using the tools and materials available to him. The material at hand for each of these two is the same, the world, but the tools available differ greatly. Aunt Emily comes from an aristocratic tradition with a strong ethical code. Binx’s mother, having endured many hardships, clings to the familiar. Whereas Aunt Emily paints everything as “heroic” or “craven,” Binx’s mother aims at “the canny management of the shocks of life, . . . a general belittlement of everything, the good and the bad.” The two are best contrasted in Binx’s description of his inheritance from each: “[With my aunt’s family] in Feliciana Parish I became accustomed to sitting on the porch in the dark and talking of the size of the universe and the treachery of men; [with my mother’s family] on the Gulf Coast I have become accustomed to eating crabs and drinking beer under a hundred and fifty watt bulb,” but Binx goes on to say that “one is as pleasant a way as the other of passing a summer night.” This he does not mean “pleasant” as a compliment. He sees these as ways of crafting an image of the world based on pre-set criteria—in one case a strong tradition, in another a timid clinging to what is familiar—but he deplores the idea that one can be such an artist of life. We have observed that he himself has similar tendencies, and so we know that he’s being inconsistent. We might then ask, What are Binx’s criteria? What tools does he use to craft his image of the world?

The answer is not difficult. It’s the title of the novel. Binx not only summarizes the lives of those around him in the style of a movie summary, basing everything on appearances, fitting people into genres, but he also constantly imagines himself to be in a movie and judges his actions and those of others based on criteria gotten from the world of film. Though there are countless examples of Binx framing his life as a movie, his cinematic ethic in particular has its climactic application in a reflection on his “romantic” encounter he has with Kate. On the train ride to Chicago, the two sleep together in the roomette of the train. It is ambiguous to what extent they are actually (to use Aunt Emily’s euphemism) “intimate.” All we know is that “we did very badly and almost did not do at all. Flesh poor flesh failed us.” But what exactly did flesh fail them in, relative to what standard? In recounting the event to movie star Rory Calhoun (apparently in a kind of prayer, since Rory is not actually present), Binx laments that he neither maintained a chaste, virtuous distance from Kate as Rory would have, nor ravished her as would a hero from a novel. Binx calls Rory’s actions virtuous, but it seems he would be just as satisfied to have acted the part of the presumably vicious hero of the novel. Binx’s ethical standard is not a traditional view of morality, but a measure of how film-worthy an action seems. He fails with Kate not because he does anything wrong morally, but because the way he acts wouldn’t make a good movie. In order to be consistent with his own condemnation of his aunt’s and his mother’s ways of summarily judging the world based on pre-set criteria, Binx needs in some way to confront his own judgment, his own way of framing the world through a cinematic lens.

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7 Lawson, 26.
8 Percy, 15.
9 Ibid., 49.
10 Ibid., 85.
11 Ibid., 152.
12 Percy, 142.
13 Ibid., 153-154.
14 Ibid., 222.
15 Ibid., 200.
16 Ibid., 199-200.
Some evidence that he makes progress on this front by the end of the novel comes in the scene of Aunt Emily’s scolding. At one point she asks him, “Do you condone your behavior with Kate?,” to which he responds, “Con-done?” To condone something implies having some ethical standard by which to measure it. Binx has had movies as his standard, and perhaps he simply does not mention them now because that would be embarrassing in front of his aunt, but there is also the possibility that he has come to recognize their insufficiency. Movies reside in the world of art, and as such they deal with what is “insubstantial.” Characters in movies cannot have the same substance that people have, cannot have the same ambiguities. Characters are written. Their lives are scripted, and everything they do has an intended significance. People simply exist. If Binx has come to learn anything by the end of the novel, it will have to do with the way in which people exist, and how it’s different from the way in which characters exist.

Having looked at some of the ways in which Binx sees people as characters—easily summarizable, their ethics reducible to aesthetics—we might now look at how he engages characters, to see whether or not he treats them as people, and whether or not such treatment makes sense. We have already pointed out a logical distinction between people and characters, that is, the difference there is between Harrison Ford and Indiana Jones. But there is an analogous way in which it makes sense to treat characters as people, as when we suspend our disbelief and become engrossed in a movie (or any work of fiction). We know that the characters are fictional, but we become emotionally invested in them as if they were real people. Does Binx suspend his disbelief when he sees movies? Or, further, is he an escapist, who goes to the movies to forget about the harshness or ennui of everyday life? If we take a look at the actual scenes in which he goes to the movies, or even watches them at home, we’ll see that, in fact, the opposite is the case.

From the outset of the novel, movie theaters are not made out to be places of isolation. When Binx recalls the time that he and his old secretary Linda went to see a movie together, the inside of the theater and the world outside are by no means separate. “Even inside you could hear the racket [of the strong wind],” and outside “the manager had to yell to be heard while from the sidewalk speaker directly over his head came the twittering conversation of the [characters in the movie].” The two worlds battle against each other for attention, and Binx does not escape either of them fully. Later on, Binx makes it more explicit that this attitude of not being fully engrossed in the movie, of not escaping the real world and entering fully into the world of art, is intentional. “Before I see a movie it is necessary for me to learn something about the theater or the people who operate it, to touch base before going inside. . . . If I did not . . . , I should be lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking. I should be seeing one copy of a film which might be shown anywhere and at any time. There is a danger of slipping clean out of space and time.” He feels a need to be grounded in the real world whenever he’s engaging with the screen world. When at home watching TV, his posture is attentive but unnatural, “bolt upright and hands on knees in my ladder-back chair,” hardly your typical couch potato, hardly engrossed in the screen world. Binx does not suspend his disbelief. He treats characters as characters, and not in any way, not even analogously, as people.

Binx also talks about this spatiotemporal hyper-awareness of his (which we might well just call his rootedness in the real world) outside of the context of moviegoing, for example when reflecting on his insomnia: “I always know where I am and what time it is,” and, later, “staying awake is a kind of sickness and sleep is forever guarded against by a dizzy dutiful alertness.” This rootedness in space and time is proper to the private, experienced realm of life, in which the individual is not a written character, does not exist solely as the words he says or the actions he performs in the present moment, but rather he is a person, existing across time and space. The fact that Binx is so anxious to cling to this rootedness implies that he does not treat moviegoing as an escape. He in fact fears escaping, fears becoming too engrossed in the movies he watches.

He even actively criticizes instances he sees of others being engrossed. He describes a couple he sees on the ferry as “not really mindful of each other but gazing with a mild abiding astonishment at the world around.” This example illustrates exactly what it is about engrossment that Binx dislikes. Being engrossed in the screen world even though they’re not at the movies. It’s as if they’re at a theater because they see only the world ahead of them, as an object, and they don’t see the viewers around them. In Binx’s words, “though they sit holding hands, they could be strangers.”

Movie theaters, with their dim lights, large screens, and loud speakers, are especially conducive to this isolated, engrossed mode of living, but Binx actively refuses to succumb to it. In fact, he uses moviegoing as an opportunity to connect with others. Whenever he’s at the movies, he habitually looks around the theater to see the faces of the other moviegoers, to see what they’re thinking or feeling. There are two occasions of moviegoing in particular, one literal and one figurative, that best show how moviegoing helps Binx to form real relationships with others.

The first is the time Binx takes his half-brother Lonnie to see a movie. It has already been established that he and Lonnie have a close relationship, in fact that “he is my favorite. . . . Like me, he is a moviegoer.” At the movie, as usual, Binx is not engrossed in the film, but very aware of his surroundings, describing them in detail. He looks around him (the action of looking around at movie theaters being so typical for Binx that it doesn’t even require narration) and sees that “Lonnie is very happy.” As he and Binx share their moviegoing experience, they see each other and, in doing so, “know

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17 Percy, 4.
18 Ibid., 5.
19 Ibid., 74-75.
20 Percy, 78.
21 Ibid., 84.
22 Ibid., 189.
23 Ibid., 129.
24 Ibid., 129.
25 Ibid., 137.
26 Ibid., 143.
that the other sees.”27 In this moment, for Binx, Lonnie is not simply an object. He cannot be characterized as summarily as is usual for Binx, or even as Binx describes Sharon in this same scene, whom he labels as being “just like the girls in the movies who won’t put out until you prove to them what a nice unselfish fellow you are, a lover of children and dogs.”28 Lonnie is not simply something that Binx experiences. He is himself an experiencer of life, and it is the act of watching a movie that helps Binx realize this.

Later, on Ash Wednesday, in the final paragraph of the novel before the epilogue, there occurs a scene that reveals how Binx has learned to see not only his closest connections like Lonnie or Kate in this way, as subjective individuals, but also each of his unknown fellow men. With Binx watching from afar, a Negro man exits the church where Ash Wednesday services have been held, and Binx wonders why he is here: “Is it part and parcel of the complex business of coming up in the world? Or is it because he believes that God himself is present here at the corner or Elysian Fields and Bons Enfants? Or is it here for both reasons: through some dim dazzling trick of grace, coming for the one and receiving the other as God’s own importunate bonus? It is impossible to say.”29 Binx has learned to appreciate the mystery of every man’s life. He no longer tries to summarize, only to describe. He doesn’t ignore the Negro as something completely unknowable, but he also doesn’t make overconfident, definitive judgments about his life, as he did with the honeymooners and the couple on the boat. The shared nature of moviegoing has contributed to this development in Binx’s way of encountering the world.

The second occasion of moviegoing that influences Binx’s way of living among others is an example of figurative moviegoing, and it deals more with the concept of acting than of watching movies. It is the scene in which Binx and Kate, sitting on the mezzanine at Aunt Emily’s house, look out over the dining room, where the family has gathered for Sunday dinner and where Sam Yerger is delivering a speech of sorts. The mezzanine is an image of the private realm, the personal, experienced world of real life, and the dining room is the public realm, the art world. “The angle is such that [from the mezzanine] we can see the dining room and its company,”30 implying that the relationship between the two places is like that between a moviegoer and the screen, and this similarity is made explicit when Kate is described as looking down at Sam “like a theater-goer in the balcony.”31 Kate and Binx sit on the mezzanine together, sharing their private experiences, in contrast with the overtly public scene taking place in the room below, and Binx learns more about Kate’s situation.

Kate’s situation acts in some ways as a foil for Binx’s. While the two are similar in many ways, they differ starkly when the divide between the public and private realms is considered. We have learned before now that Kate does not like the idea of acting out a scripted role in life. She had always thought that it was an unfortunate necessity to do so, until she had her epiphany of sorts and declared that “a person does not have to be this or be that or be anything, not even oneself. One is free.”32 This is the beginning of her retreat from the public realm, in which a person is known, if not intimately, at least by the role he plays, to the private realm, in which a person is anonymous.

Kate wants to be unknown so that she can be radically free and not have to conform to any expectations or act in any particular way. This fear of having any public face at all is apparent in the scene with Binx and Kate overlooking the dining room: “It is her sense of [her family’s] waiting upon her and that alone that intrudes itself into her mezzanine.”33 The public world is encroaching on her little private place. She is realizing, and she reveals this realization to Binx in this scene, that, whether she likes it or not, she is part of the physical world. She occupies space, and she cannot negate the fact that she has to act in some particular way. She cannot, Binx claims, do what she wants and “be an anyone who is anywhere.”34 She must be somebody somewhere. She makes the same discovery that Binx himself made when he considered himself “an Anyone living Anywhere”35 and sought to explain and, according to himself, succeeded at explaining the world scientifically: “There I lay in my hotel room with my search over yet still obliged to draw one breath and then the next.”36 On the mezzanine, Kate tells Binx about the previous night, when she may have attempted suicide (though she denies that this is what happened). Then, “for the first time . . . I became aware of my own breathing.”37 What Binx and Kate have discovered in noticing their breathing is that their presence in the physical world, the public world of appearances, is unavoidable. Kate thought she had discovered that a person didn’t need to act at all, but the very nature of existing as a person in the world is one of constantly acting.

And, notably, unlike in movies, people in life exist at times when nothing dramatic or interesting is happening. People are like the old movie theater seats that Binx notices when he goes and sees a movie with Kate. The seats live through “all the nights, the rainy summer nights at twelve and one and two o’clock when [they endure] alone in the empty theater. The enduring is something which must be accounted for.”38 Kate fails to account for, or at least by the end of the novel has not yet successfully accounted for, the enduring. In the end, having resigned herself to the fact that she must act some part, she asks Binx to direct her every move. She does not write her own script, but simply chooses someone she thinks she can trust and asks him to write it for her. Kate has willingly entered the public realm by the end, which is progress, but she has done so without really engaging it with her private world. The two for her remain separate.

Binx’s predicament is different from Kate’s. Whereas she flees the public world to find shelter in her private anonymity, Binx feels much more comfortable in a public mask. As mentioned above, he is constantly viewing his life through a movie lens. He models his actions after famous movie stars. Binx, unlike Kate, feels at home in the public world and flees the private realm. Or

27 Percy., 143-144.
28 Ibid., 143.
29 Percy, 235.
30 Ibid., 176.
31 Ibid., 177.
32 Percy., 114.
33 Ibid., 176.
34 Ibid., 190.
35 Ibid., 69.
36 Ibid., 70.
37 Ibid., 181.
38 Ibid., 80.
perhaps another way to put it is that Binx is used to acting in the public world, and he does not know how to make the private world cohere with the public, does not know how to live life as anything other than a piece of art. In the scene on the mezzanine, he tries. There, Binx has entered into Kate’s private world and attempted to escape the public world of the dining room, Aunt Emily and her tradition. On the train ride to Chicago and until their return, he and Kate maintain this attitude, trying to be “alone together in the midst of strangers,” like moviegoers in a dark movie theater, isolated in their own viewing, trying not to act out any written roles. But when Binx is scolded by Aunt Emily for taking the mentally ill Kate with him to Chicago without telling anyone, these are her words: “In all of past history people who found themselves in difficult situations behaved in certain familiar ways... Your discovery... is that one finding oneself in one of life’s critical situations need not after all respond in one of the traditional ways. No. One may simply default. Pass. Go as one pleases, shrug, turn on one’s heel and leave. Exit. Why after all need one act humanly?”

Aunt Emily reminds Binx’s that the public world of appearances, of those appearances by which everybody else in the world knows one, is real. It is not a merely accidental manifestation of one’s radically free interior self.

This scolding sends Binx into a crisis, since the world Aunt Emily puts forth as being so real is exactly the world he has been seeing as fake, as acted. In his subsequent reflection on his progress, or lack of progress, in his “dark pilgrimage on this earth,” when he claims, “I know nothing,” he is really saying that he knows no one. He lives in what he sees as “the great shithouse of scientific humanism, where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone, a warm and creative person, and prospers like a dung beetle.” There is a total disconnect between his personal experience and the physical, public world around him, which houses not people, but types. When Binx says that “my search has been abandoned,” he is speaking of his search for a connection between his private and public worlds, his experienced real life and his acted screen life, both of which, at this point, unarguably exist. The total split between the two is apparent in the next scene, in which Binx falls prey to his desire and seeks out a girl, any girl, at first Sharon, but when her roommate Joyce answers the phone, then Joyce. When Binx speaks to her, he does not attribute the dialogue to himself, but to “a voice from old Virginia.” He is, metaphorically, watching a movie himself speaking, in which he plays an “old confederate Marlon Brando.” The voice, “comes into my ear and I myself am silent.” Apparently “I myself,” that is, Binx himself, is not the same person as the Binx on the phone. Eventually “it is too much trouble to listen” to himself talk. The divide between Binx’s interior thinking self and his physical existence has gone from epistemological to moral. He has contempt for the physical world.

This is the exact type of Cartesian split that Nash argues characterizes Binx’s moviegoing, the exact type of distance from reality that Lawson says is the primary effect of the image of moviegoing. Yet how does Binx escape this discontinuity? “At last I spy Kate... looking sideways at the children and not seeing, and she could be I myself, sooty eyed and nowhere.” She is “nowhere” in the same sense that Binx has previously feared being nowhere, feared “slipping clean out of space and time,” and this is certainly in line with the above critics’ views. But she is also “I myself.” Binx knows her not as an object in a distant world, something inaccessible, but as a fellow moviegoer. Perhaps she doesn’t share this knowledge. Perhaps she doesn’t see Binx as a fellow moviegoer. Perhaps she sees him as another actor on the screen. Arguably she sees him as a film director. In any case, Binx realizes that Kate occupies with him the private realm of lived experience. Note that the image that sets up this scene is “the playground [near Binx’s apartment, which] looks as if it alone had survived the end of the world.” Why it alone? What’s so special about this playground in particular? The answer is that Binx is there. It alone is the place on earth currently being experienced by Binx, the full extent of his private, experienced world.

It is at this point that Binx decides to do what he has been avoiding throughout the entire novel. He takes up the role in society that’s expected of him and goes to medical school. He determines that “there is only one thing I can do: listen to people, see how they stick themselves into the world, hand forth as being so real is exactly the world he has been seeing as fake, as acted. In his subsequent reflection on his progress, or lack of progress, in his “dark pilgrimage on this earth,” when he claims, “I know nothing,” he is really saying that he knows no one. He lives in what he sees as “the great shithouse of scientific humanism, where needs are satisfied, everyone becomes an anyone, a warm and creative person, and prospers like a dung beetle.” There is a total disconnect between his personal experience and the physical, public world around him, which houses not people, but types. When Binx says that “my search has been abandoned,” he is speaking of his search for a connection between his private and public worlds, his experienced real life and his acted screen life, both of which, at this point, unarguably exist. The total split between the two is apparent in the next scene, in which Binx falls prey to his desire and seeks out a girl, any girl, at first Sharon, but when her roommate Joyce answers the phone, then Joyce. When Binx speaks to her, he does not attribute the dialogue to himself, but to “a voice from old Virginia.” He is, metaphorically, watching a movie of himself speaking, in which he plays an “old confederate Marlon Brando.” The voice, “comes into my ear and I myself am silent.” Apparently “I myself,” that is, Binx himself, is not the same person as the Binx on the phone. Eventually “it is too much trouble to listen” to himself talk. The divide between Binx’s interior thinking self and his physical existence has gone from epistemological to moral. He has contempt for the physical world.

To reformulate our conclusion in different terms, Binx has realized that he must not approach life as if it were art, nor art as if it were life. He resolves to be engrossed in life, and not in art. He resolves to see life, this enduring physical reality governed by personal experience and freedom, as a mystery, not as something to be summarized in a phrase. He resolves to let art, insofar as it fails at the search, go by the wayside. (Note that in the epilogue there is not one mention of moviegoing.) This draws our attention to an uncomfortable issue, the elephant in the room. Percy’s novel is itself a work of art. How are we supposed to approach it? Should we not be fully engrossed in it while reading? Are we to assume it can be summarized in a phrase? Furthermore, Binx’s narration within the novel is arguably a work of art. It is a first-person confession, and though the audience might well be Binx alone, it has the structural unity of a piece of literature. If Binx’s final attitude toward art is one of detachment, then is he detached from his own narrative? Is that why he stops writing? These are all questions

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39 Percy, 187.
40 Ibid., 220.
41 Ibid., 228.
42 Percy, 228.
43 Ibid., 229.
44 Ibid., 230.
45 Ibid.
46 Percy, 230.
that go unanswered in my reading of *The Moviegoer*. Whether or not Binx’s attitudes toward life and art could accommodate a more engrossed enjoyment of art, an engrossment most people I have encountered do not see as a bad thing, is unclear. But Binx’s revised attitude has its virtues, and they are strong. He is now able to live in the world among others not as an isolated individual, distant from reality, a divided Cartesian self, but made whole by an awareness of himself and others as actors freely playing out their own roles.

*Outline of a Tree*
William Kostuch
Photograph
2017