PRO TANTO

THE STUDENT JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPY, LAW, & ETHICS

Spring 2024

PRO TANTO
FROM THE DIRECTOR

WELCOME

Dear readers,

On behalf of all of us at the Hoffberger Center for Ethical Engagement, we are pleased to see the continuation of the University of Baltimore student journal Pro Tanto.

The Hoffberger Center, founded in 1987, is guided by the aim of pursuing the best in ethics and values, bringing scholarship, debate, and programming to the University, the Baltimore region, and beyond. The cumulative work of each cohort of Student Fellows contributes to this vital mission, including the articles that you see before you within this publication.

We invite you to read and peruse their ideas, which resulted from semester-long discussions and meetings, as these students synthesized their learning and expanded their intellectual horizons beyond any requirements or activities within their program and major.

Each year, the Hoffberger Center selects and sponsors a cohort of Hoffberger Student Ethics Fellows through a competitive application process across the University to cultivate lifelong learning and advanced study in ethics.

I would like to thank Daniel Gellasch for his work with the Student Fellows through his many conversations and guidance as the students developed their ideas. I would also like to thank Alicia Ryan for her editorial and design work in compiling this volume. This publication would never have reached completion but through their efforts.
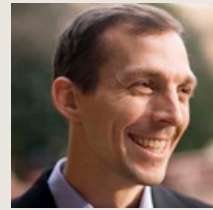
Congratulations to all the contributors to this volume: Caroline Myers, Kalvin Garrah, MIguel Miranda, Sabrina Pereira, and Takamira Williams.

In Celebration,

Steven Scalet
Director, Hoffberger Center

Steven Scalet, PhD
Director

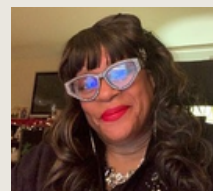Joshua Kassner, PhD
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE
1925

Hoffberger Center for Ethical Engagement

2023-24 Programming and Events

NOV. 13-17	Annual Ethics Week 2023 Theme: AI and Ethics	**MAR. 25**	Special Guest Q & A: Holocaust Survivor, Co-Sponsored
DEC. 2	2023 Northeast Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl	**APR. 4**	Danielle Allen "Justice by Means of Democracy" (University of Chicago Press, 2023)
JAN. 12 JAN. 26 FEB. 2 APR. 19	Hoffberger Educational Programming with the Schaefer Center for Public Policy	**APR. 9**	Scholarly Roundtable: Immigration (Lunch Served)
FEB. 8	Semester Welcome and Open House	**APR. 10**	Community Partnership: "Ethics and Digital Accessibility: It's A Whole New World"
FEB. 11	Annual Mid-Atlantic Regional High School Ethics Bowl	**APR. 23**	Author Meet Critics Series: Robert Talisse "Sustaining Democracy" (OUP 2021)
FEB. 13	Ethical Issues in Business & Society (IDIS 302) Instructors' Welcome	**MAY 9**	Semester Ending: Open House and Congratulations to Graduates

Recurring Events

TUESDAYS, 2:15 - 3:15 PM	Hoffberger Center Reading Group
TUESDAYS, 3:15 - 4:00 PM	Planning and Professional Development
DATE AND TIMES MAY VARY	Hoffberger Student Fellows Cohort Activities
WEDNESDAYS AT 12 PM	Common Hour
DATES AND TIMES MAY VARY	Philosophy Club Meetings and Events
FRIDAYS 10 AM - 2 PM	Meet with Daniel Gellasch: Office Hours
T/W/TH	Meet Prof. Scalet: Office Hours and by appt. sscalet@ubalt.edu

TECHNOCRACY AND LUDDISM
HOW ATTITUDES TOWARD TECHNOLOGY CAN SUBTLY INFLUENCE ETHICS
CAROLINE MYERS

The seemingly opposite reactions by those who are either for or against the use or implementation of a new technology are natural human reactions that have repeated themselves throughout history, even though as you are living through a burgeoning new technology, it seems as if this moment is the most extreme, impactful, or consequential than any comparable moment before or that will come. By examining the historical instances of reactions to new technologies, including reactions by prolific thinkers and philosophers, we will be able to logically reflect on the current technological change(s) that we are living through and our reactions to them.

For the purposes of this writing, "Technology" is defined as something invented by humans that enhances or enables the human ability to perform a function (the technology can be the thing itself that is performing the function), that alters our definition of an already existing word or concept. I will further explain by referencing the paraphrased definition of Technology as given by Stephen Robertson in his book "B C, Before Computers" – Technology examines the present state of the universe and looks for ways to modify it and mold it to our own ends. Knowing how to do the thing in question is specifically important to labeling something as technology. Technological change requires choice and is often promised to expand our horizons and opportunities. As the new technologies are adapted, we leave behind prior technologies, never to be able to return to the world as it was before. [1]

I will begin by examining technological advancements of the past and the reactions to them. This is not by any means all-encompassing of technological advancements, nor do I discuss in-depth any technologies that were invented prior to the 19th-century, but I am not proposing that this phenomenon did not occur until then. I want to first touch on an older example to highlight the consistent human capacity for pensiveness and fear in the face of a new technology.

Plato's Phaedrus; a writing from around 370 BC which ends with Socrates discussing the up-and-coming technology of the written word. [2] Socrates' depiction of the origins of the phonetic alphabet has an Egyptian god declaring that literacy was a good thing because it would improve memory, and a King said in response that people would actually lose their ability to memorize due to access of written information, and this would ultimately have a negative impact. [3] John Churchill thoughtfully expressed the relation between the words of Phaedrus with technology as such: "The point is that Socrates advances worries about writing. We must not, he says, mistake the preserved image of philosophical understanding for the understanding itself. This is a worry about technology, in this case the technology of writing, and the inclination we have to transfer our sense of what is real from the primary reality to its technological manifestation." [4] Socrates is arguably one of the most famous philosophers of all time, having been the originator of western Philosophy, but he still viewed this advanced form of communication (technology through the invention of writing materials and the written alphabet) as something that would negatively impact society and the individual. If we reflect on this a few thousand years later, do we feel as if some part of humanity was lost when we transitioned away from a society that only communicates orally?

The invention of the telegraph, specifically the electric telegraph, created a new kind of connectivity that the world had never experienced. While there were many people who came up with roughly the same invention around the same time period, the credit for inventing the telegraph in the US goes to Samuel Morse. [5] The telegraph did not single-handedly introduce the concept of communicating a message across a distance, as the use of smoke signals, beacons, and the like had been employed as methods of communication for many centuries. [6] It was still a revolution in connecting people in a way that was unlike anything before it.

For a long time, the telegraph and the railroads appeared to be two connected entities. The telegraph was not initially used by the railroad companies, and as they began to dip their toe into the telegraphic pond, they viewed the new technology as something

that was helpful but not necessary for the functioning of the railways.[7] Telegraph lines were built along railways regardless of the railroad companies' use of the technology, so the eventual conceptual merger of these two feats of human advancement was almost inevitable. The telegraph companies offered their services for the railroad companies that allowed telegraph lines to be built along their tracks, and train operators needed a better method of communication between each other to prevent serious train collisions that had become almost commonplace.[8] There was a clear and practical use of this new technology, but there were still mixed feelings towards it.

The invention and implementation of the telegraph elicited an abundance of new fears, hopes, and new ideas about communication and humanity. Excitement over this new invention was expressed many times in the newspapers, calling the telegraph "the greatest revolution of modern times and indeed of all time" and a "sensorium of communicated intelligence."[9] A prevailing fear was that this new technology could or would cause emotional chaos within individuals. The reasoning behind this potential emotional chaos varied, from men being overwhelmed by their new environment of connectivity to the world, individuals losing their sense of community, to delays in telegraph delivery of time-sensitive matters causing emotional turmoil for the recipient.[10] The telegraph also created a newfound desire in consumers of the news to have up-to-date information on foreign affairs, which had never been an option before,[11] which was cited as another reason for a potential increase in mass hysteria.[12] This sounds quite like current concerns around social media connectivity and the effects of constant access to the news; will we be saying the same things about a different technology in 150 years?

Looking back on other rhetoric around new technologies that we are now familiar with paints a similar picture. The invention of the motor vehicle led people to believe there was an addiction-like ailment that caused drivers to recklessly speed, which was sometimes called speed madness or speed mania.[13] Others said that the automobile and this speed madness that came with it was also ruining the societal norm of femininity due to its infliction upon

formerly docile and delicate women.[14] Now I am not opposed to this idea of speed madness, as I'm sure everyone who drives regularly has seen someone who fits this category, but the worries about this speeding addiction and the loss of femininity seem quite silly now.

Less proliferating in discussions of technology but a prime example when examining reactions that are grounded in emotion is genetically modified food. Science has largely agreed that there are no risks to human health, or the environment posed by genetically modified food, studies show that many people are still personally against GMFs for reasons including but not limited to their "gut reaction," the technology being "new."[15] It is evident that the fear of the unknown risk or potential of threat has an impact on how individuals feel, not just with GMFs but with all new technologies.[16] This catastrophizing seems very natural to us, but it has the potential to captivate public discourse it a way that is unproductive.

If you are thinking that you are a logical and rational person and would never pander to baseless hysteria, I would like to explore some incredibly intelligent thinkers having similar, or interesting, reactions. Remarks made by prominent 20th-century philosopher Martin Heidegger on technology are quite applicable.[17] When it comes to technology, Heidegger saw the increased access to information and had fears that it would "swallow his own writings", going so far to suggest that this new age of information processing could lead to the end of *thinking,* which seems quite dramatic now.[18] Despite Heidegger's voiced concerns, he referred to himself as a soft determinist, someone who was neither optimistic or pessimistic about technology, but was accepting of whatever the future outcome may be while examining its impact.[19] Even though he had clear concerns about the effects of technology, he still proclaimed to be a neutral party. It's possible that he was blind to his own biases and fears.

Hans Jonas, a disciple and later critic of Heidegger, voiced his thoughts on why people had these fears surrounding technology. Jonas saw a heuristic of fear, in regard to modern technology, as a tool in which we could determine the ethics of technology; the

imaginary dangers about the future of humanity (not fears regarding themselves) allow us to emotionally prepare for the technological changes. [20] This analysis of the fear of technology, which Jonas calls a "selfless fear", explicitly disregards "fear or anxiety for oneself" which impactfully dismisses the true selfish nature of humans and their individual desire for survival or success from his discussion. [21] I do think that it is important to remember that when Jonas was reviewing the fears of technology, it was in an era when the new technologies weren't coming directly into the hands of every individual but were more so being used by professionals or people with certain qualifications. It is apparent that the cold-war reminiscent technological advancements influenced Jonas' perception of how humans see technology but is nonetheless an interesting perspective.

The profound media philosopher Marshall McLuhan had a similar line of thinking about technology and the future as Heidegger's supposed neutrality but was not ignorant of his own fears and biases. McLuhan did not want to publicly announce his judgements and opinions of technological advancements as they were "far too important and too large in scope to deserve a merely private opinion". [22] To me, this is a reasonable way to acknowledge that you have innate worries that you cannot stop, but still having a logical reaction to your reaction. We should all strive to be McLuhanian in our reactions to new technology.

Discussion

There are many reasons that can be cited for why people may have certain feelings about technology, of which I will discuss a few theories that stick out to me. What I think to be simplest of the reasons that people are so alarmed by new technology is because they are suddenly introduced to an entirely new meaning of an existing word or concept. This phenomenon of the definition of a word changing, called a semantic shift, happens naturally with many words not necessarily related to technology, but those changes are much more gradual (Minkova, Stockwell 2009). When a technology is the cause of a semantic change, it is much more abrupt. Described by James Gleick:

"In this time of conceptual change, mental readjustments were needed to understand the telegraph itself. Confusion inspired anecdotes, which often turned on awkward new meanings of familiar terms: innocent words like send, and heavily laden ones, like message. There was the woman who brought a dish of sauerkraut into the telegraph office in Karlsruhe to be "sent" to her son in Rastatt. She had heard of soldiers being "sent" to the front by telegraph. There was the man who brought a "message" into the telegraph office in Bangor, Maine. The operator manipulated the telegraph key and then placed the paper on the hook. The customer complained that the message had not been sent, because he could still see it hanging on the hook... A message had seemed to be a physical object. That was always an illusion; now people needed consciously to divorce their conception of the message from the paper on which it was written." [23]

Practical language aside, the most intriguing theories that I have come across of why people have these reactions to new technologies are ones involving power. Michel Foucault of course had many writings on his ideas of power, but one account he gives regarding power and technology is that "technology is just one among many similar mechanisms of social control, all based on apparently neutral knowledge, all having asymmetrical effects on social power." While this is an interesting approach, I am thinking of power as something different; not power on a larger scale such as institutional power, but something smaller but more pervasive in an individual's unconscious. When it comes to human emotions in the face of reaction, I envision power as the ability to legitimately act in response to another's action in a way that disciplines or normalizes the actions themselves. This power exists between individuals as a way to enforce norms. Not only societal norms, but norms within a power structure, such as in the workplace or in a family. The person with power has an ability to influence someone else's decision making, either through prior thought or action after the fact. This power isn't something blatant that exists in the forefront of our minds, but something subtle that underlies interactions. This idea of power is by Foucault's later
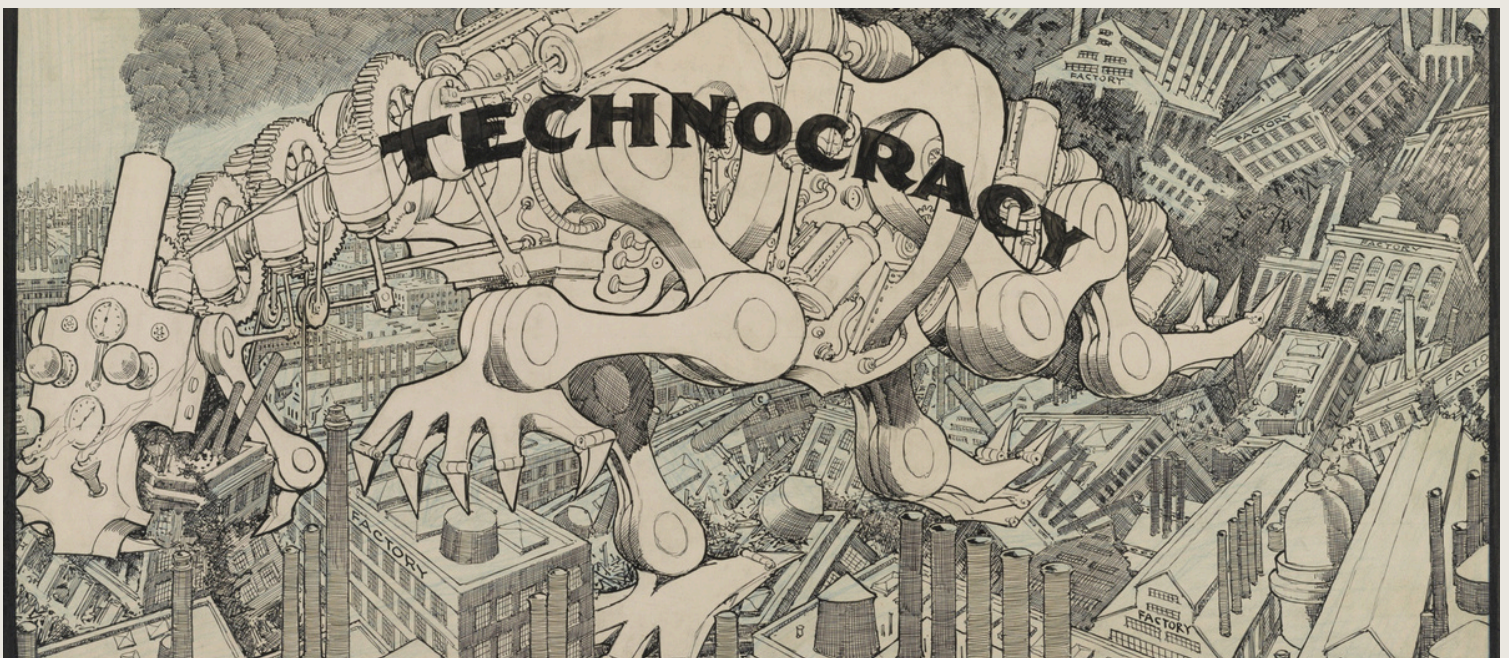
"produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another." [25] This idea of power could likely be defined as normative power.

Power as described above could be important in shaping an individual's identity or self-esteem, and a new technology could seem like a threat to that. On the other hand, it could appear to be a way to potentially boost one's power. If you think back to any period of new technological advancements, as discussed above, there are always people who are vocally opposed to its implementation. Those fears often appear to sound like a concern for greater humanity, but I think that they are actually somewhat selfish fears. In Plato's Phaedrus as discussed above, Socrates vocalized that his worry about the proliferation of the written word would have mental consequences for individuals as well as that a piece of writing would not hold the same meaning, truth, and conviction as the author intended and would have conveyed through speech. Socrates was a skilled speaker and possibly even more skilled at discourse. I am reminded of a section of *Meno*, in which Meno expresses a sort of bewilderment to Socrates' ability to make a person (Meno in this instance) doubt their formerly concrete convictions. [26] Socrates had gained a reputation for doing just that. Of course, this was done solely through speech, and I am inclined to believe that Socrates (subconsciously or consciously) worried about losing his influence and reputation if his words were conveyed through writing instead of orally. I am not suggesting that Socrates was concerned with losing favorability with individuals, but that he felt attached to this power that he gained through his skill of speaking and thought that he would lose some of that power or influence if translated to the written word. Especially when thinking of the importance that Socrates placed on discourse, if he lost discourse to the written word, his knowledge would not be able to progress.

Now to touch on the technological elephant in the room (at least at the time of writing) – Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is an interesting example as the idea of it and attempts to achieve it have been happening for over a century, but it is just now becoming the prominent technological concern of our time. I would like to discuss a few prominent historical figures and their thoughts on the subject. I want to begin with Alan Turing, who in 1950, spoke of on the irrational fear stemming from anthropocentric bias that humans had of machines becoming close to our level of intelligence for it threatened our innately superior feeling. [27]

It seems that this is a good descriptor of much of the fears we are seeing around AI, or at least the root of the fears. But even before Turing, there was Charles Babbage. Babbage was a mathematician in the nineteenth century who is largely credited with the first idea of what we know of today as a computer,

though many of his ideas were not taken seriously at the time.[28] Babbage was also an early believer that machines could one day be intelligent, but this intelligence was of its own and not an imitation or representative of human intelligence.[29] Many years later, in the 1940s and 1950s, scientists such as Warren McCulloch and Norbert Wiener became invested in researching the intersection of scientific and philosophical disciplines in cybernetics and brain research.[30] These scientists were very much interested in the philosophical Mind Body problem; McCulloch proclaimed that his coal was to "bridge the traditional gulf between mind and body... the mind was ideas and purposes; body was stuff and process." [31] A notable philosopher who spent much of his time refuting the possibilities of machine intelligence was Hubert Dreyfus. While many of his proclamations have not stood the test of time, he had a front-row seat to AI developments as a professor at MIT in the 1960s, so even if his predictions did not come true, his fears can still provide valuable insight. [32] He saw the computer as a metaphysical opponent and asserted that if we believed we could create machines to replicate human thought, we were deluding ourselves. [33] We are still grappling with these same debates in 2023, but with much more advanced AI. There are the same discussions of AI replacing human jobs, just as Babbage thought of his analytical engine so many years ago, but there are other projected fears gaining traction, such as that the threat of AI and new technologies will allow the bureaucracy to demand more authorities over our freedoms. [34] While this may not solve any pressing matters around AI, looking at how it has taken centuries to evolve scientifically with a watchful eye from philosophers the entire time gives me a sense of comfort.

We will likely not be able to see the true impact of the burgeoning new technology until long after we have lived through it. By reflecting on the past, we can see that this is likely a predictable pattern in which the hysteria will die down, humans will adapt to the new technology   while trying to fix whatever problems arise from it. The fear of new technology may not always be grounded in reason, but it affects even the most intelligent and profound thinkers, so we are all in good company.

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1925

Hoffberger Center for Ethical Engagement

AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS

Featuring: Prof. Robert Talisse's
Sustaining Democracy:
What We Owe to the Other Side, OUP 2021

APRIL 23, 2024
11:30 AM - 1:50 PM
Bogomolny Library
BL 412

11:30 – 12:30 PM - Author and Critic Presentations
12:30 – 1:50 PM - Questions and Discussion

Launched in Fall 2020, the Author Meets Critics Series inspires ethics-related dialogue through debate and cross-disciplinary conversation. Each session includes an author presentation, two or more critics, an author response, and a question-and-answer session with the audience. Learn More Here.

Speakers Include: Professor Robert Talisse (Vanderbilt University), Professor Karen Stohr (Georgetown University, Kennedy Institute of Ethics), Professor Shelly Clay-Robison (The University of Baltimore), Mr. Benjamin Klutsey (Mercatus Center, George Mason University). See attached bios for more information.

These events are free and open to the public. Buffet Lunch is included.

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Philosophy, Law, and Ethics

UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE
Helen P. Denit Honors Program

QR Zoom Link:

Meeting ID: 953 8388 0584
Passcode: HCEE

SPEAKER BIOS

Professor Robert Talisse
(Vanderbilt University)

Robert B. Talisse is W. Alton Jones, Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He specializes in democratic theory, with an emphasis on citizenship, political disagreement, and polarization. Talisse is the author of over 100 academic articles and 15 books. His latest book is titled Sustaining Democracy: What We Owe to the Other Side. His next book will be published in December of 2024; it is titled Civic Solitude: Why Democracy Needs Distance.

Professor Karen Stohr
(Georgetown University, Kennedy Institute of Ethics)

Karen Stohr is the Ryan Family Professor of Metaphysics and Moral Philosophy at Georgetown University and a Senior Research Scholar in the Kennedy Institute of Ethics. Her primary research area is ethics, especially contemporary Kantian and Aristotelian ethics. She is particularly interested in the ways in which moral values and ideals get expressed in social life. Stohr is the author of On Manners (Routledge, 2011); Minding the Gap: Moral Ideals and Moral Improvement (Oxford University Press, 2019) and Choosing Freedom: A Kantian Guide to Life (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Professor Shelly Clay-Robison
(The University of Baltimore)

Shelly Clay-Robison, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Negotiations and Conflict Management program at the University of Baltimore. Her current research is in Indonesia, where she works with 1965 mass killing survivors, peacebuilders, artists, and activists who are creating social change. Before working in higher education, her career focused on international human rights policy and the protection of civilians during armed conflict.

Mr. Benjamin Klutsey
(Mercatus Center, George Mason University)

Incoming Executive Director Ben Klutsey currently leads the Program on Pluralism and Civil Exchange, a Mercatus Center initiative dedicated to fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for pluralism as a fundamental pillar of a free, flourishing, and prosperous society. In his role, he collaborates with thought leaders, scholars, and dedicated practitioners, aiming to cultivate pluralistic values across society. He runs the Pluralist Lab, a series of structured sessions that bring students from different backgrounds and perspectives together to practice conversation across those differences.

DIMINISHED AGENCY AND CRIMINAL CULPABILITY:
REDEFINING OUR JUSTICE SYSTEMS BINARY VIEW OF AGENCY

KALVIN GARRAH

Introduction

Within our current legal system, those who have been indicted in criminal court cases must be deemed "competent to stand trial" before they can be tried for their alleged crimes. Despite this, there are currently no standardized methods for assessing competency. This means that judges and forensic psychologists are making determinations about a defendant's mental states and cognitive abilities in incredibly high-stakes situations (e.g. people facing long-term incarceration, or serious criminal charges) with no empirical basis for these determinations. At best, this is mildly troubling - at worst, it is cause for great concern. Importantly, we do have standardized ways of assessing for insanity when "not guilty by reason of insanity" (NGRI) defenses are brought up in criminal proceedings. This is odd, as intuitively, determining one's mental state at a time in the past (for insanity assessments) seems like a much more difficult undertaking than determining someone's mental state at the present moment (for competency assessments). Why have we, as a society, cared more about standardizing insanity than we have competency?

Conceptual Clarity

The answers to these questions lie within our society's dependence on retribution and punishment as means of enacting justice. Both competency and insanity evaluations deal with assessments of agency - one's capacity to act autonomously, make conscious choices, and exercise their free will. Insanity evaluations seek to determine whether one's agency was diminished to such an extent at the time of their crime that it would be unjust to hold them criminally culpable for their action(s). Competency evaluations, on the other hand, seek to determine whether one's agency is diminished presently to such an extent that they can not currently face trial for alleged criminal acts. In a society that relies primarily on retribution and punishment to enact justice, it makes sense that the bar for one to be deemed "insane" is set high; a finding of NGRI means that the legal system can no longer

deliver punishment to a defendant who did in fact commit the criminal act in question. Conversely, for competency evaluations, it makes sense for our society to set a lower bar - neglecting to standardize competency makes it easier for defendants to be deemed fit to stand trial, and thus more likely to face punishment for wrongdoings. Standardizing insanity has allowed us to conceptualize agency, at least in the justice system, as a binary concept - one either fits the standardized criteria for insanity, or they do not. However, agency cannot be fully encapsulated by this binary view.

In philosophy, justice can be understood as establishing balance or fairness. Within our legal system, crimes are wrongdoings which must be balanced, or made good in some way. Under this definition, justice can only be served when one's level of culpability (or the degree of moral or legal responsibility an individual should face for an action) is balanced with one's level of agency at the time of that action. An individual's agency can become diminished when external factors impact their capacity to make a utonomous, rational decisions, or inhibit their ability to comprehend the consequences of those actions. Seeing as these concepts of culpability and agency are closely tied to one another, culpability can (and should) consider these external factors.

Philosophical Underpinnings

Drawing from the deontological framework of ethics, it is essential to acknowledge the intentions which precede actions. Within our legal system, the concept of mens rea ("the guilty mind", or the intention/knowledge of wrongdoing that precedes a crime) is a critical component of determining culpability. Mens rea, like agency, should be treated as a spectrum. Though uncomfortable, it is important to address the tension between adequately holding individuals responsible for their wrongdoing (especially when they have hurt others, or pose a threat to others) while also fully recognizing limitations of that person's autonomy and rationality. Suppose we define *autonomy* as an individual's capacity to make their

own choices, free from external coercion or influence. Is it still fair to say they are acting fully autonomously if their behaviors are influenced by factors beyond their control, including the environment they grew up in, or their genetics?

Kantian ethicists argue that we should act in accordance with principles that can be universalized, without contradiction. When applying this to the issue of diminished agency and culpability, it is necessary to examine whether the notion that we should hold individuals fully responsible for certain actions, under all circumstances, can be universalized. Our society has deemed it an obligation of the justice system to help individuals accused of crimes restore their agency, in an effort to help them make rational decisions and act in congruence with the moral standards of society in the future. This requires a shift from punishment/retribution to rehabilitative efforts, and acknowledgement of agency as a nuanced concept.

Implementation to the Legal System

Our current system attempts to paint criminal defendants as either having had 100% agency at the time of their crimes (adjudicated guilty), or 0% agency at the time of their crimes (adjudicated not guilty by reason of insanity). Suppose we were to instead adjudicate a defendant as having had, for example, 60% agency at the time of their crime. In that case, it may become easier to assign consequences that more

accurately reestablish balance to wrongdoing (thus, easier to enact true justice). Conceptualizing agency as a spectrum could help our legal system establish more standardized sentencing guidelines which fully take into account differing levels of agency; our current guidelines are arbitrary, as two people who have committed the same crime under similar mitigating circumstances could still be given vastly different sentences. While our current sentencing standards do sometimes take into account external circumstances (e.g. one's criminal history, events leading up to the crime, mental illness), they do not explicitly address the level of agency one had at the time of their crime unless that person is deemed not guilty by reason of insanity.

It is essential to acknowledge that pointing out the intricate and multifaceted nature of agency does not mean those with diminished agency should be free of consequences. There is a thin line between assigning a fair level of culpability to those with diminished agency, and keeping people on the hook for reprehensible acts. Even with this in mind, it still seems necessary for our society and legal system to work towards viewing agency as a spectrum in the same way we do culpability.

Conclusion

In sum, conceptualizing agency as a rigid dichotomy is intellectually dishonest. It is a conception that ignores the complexity of human behavior, and the dynamics which underlie behavior, influenced by several factors that are sometimes out of an agent's control. Moreover, our society has, without hesitation, defined legal culpability as a spectrum - why have we neglected to do the same for agency? How can our justice system be fair or just if it does not also view agency as a spectrum, seeing as these concepts are so closely entwined? If we want to instill true justice in response to criminal acts, it is our responsibility to assign blame for these acts proportional not just to actions/outcomes involved in wrongdoings, but also to the external factors that underlie them.

MEANING:

WHAT ROLE SHOULD IT PLAY IN HOW WE UNDERSTAND OUR LIVES?

MIGUEL MIRANDA

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and consciousness through a subjective lens, avoiding drawing conclusions about the objective aspects of life. In phenomenology, meaningfulness can be described as the significance of experiences, objects, thoughts, and events that appeal to the subjective consciousness. More specifically, meaningfulness in life is characterized by experiences in life produced by conscious and deliberate acts and thoughts that are in alignment with a personal mission. In existentialism, the meaning of one's life is established by the deliberate agency of an individual in a life of absurdity. The absurdity in life that Albert Camus refers to is the lack of an inherent value in life with an inevitable death that soon follows. Camus stated that humans must revolt against the unforgiving current of life by asserting their autonomy and acting based on thoughtful deliberation. In other words, stimulating conscious thoughts and actions are the key to fighting against the current of absurdity. Displays of meaningfulness can be interpreted as actions or thoughts that lead to feelings of fulfillment, personal significance, and the expression and upholding of values. The ability to perceive meaningfulness is a defining quality of conscious and sentient beings such as humans, because they establish goals and missions in life that can be deontological and work in contrast to consequentialist motivation. Non-sentient beings may choose among certain goals and actions, but they lack the ability to recognize the absurdity of life and revolt against it. Although a number of animals have expressed some level of consciousness and critical thinking, it is nowhere near that of the capacity of humans. Humans are capable of establishing lifelong desires and goals, and some are willing to deny themselves of pleasures or good outcomes for the sake of an ultimate goal that is defined by themselves or external belief systems.

Many philosophers have different definitions on suffering and with varying significance on human life, but many would agree that suffering is simply physical pain, mental stress, ignorance, fear, and sadness. Existentialists will argue that these negative experiences prove that life is absurd, or that life lacks

an inherent value and there is no meaning or significance in the human condition. The human desire to find meaning in life is an example of absurdity because it clashes with the lack of direction in the universe, leading to feelings of existential dread between our yearning for significance in an answerless life. Animals are an interesting case because they live in the same domain as humans and have shared interactions, but it is unlikely that any animal would interpret the same experiences and events as a human would. High intelligence animals such as chimpanzees, octopi, and dolphins have all expressed some level of problem-solving and basic communication, but they lack the advanced agency required to make deliberations and reflections on their lives. A key component in existentialism is the ability to recognize absurdity through a subjective lens and beyond the scope of simple negative emotion. If an organism is unable to become aware of what makes life absurd, then it is not suffering to an existential degree like humans. Although capable of experiencing pain, longing, and fear, animals are unable to experience existential dread from the lack of perceived meaning. Not only this, but humans are also capable of establishing their own meaning in

life and pursuing goals to fulfill those desires. At any point in life, a conscious human can conjure ideas and actions that they believe are giving them a purpose in a harsh, deaf world. In acting upon these deliberations, humans are capable of fighting against the absurdity of life and expressing their freedom.

Meaningfulness uniquely addresses the human experiences of difficulties in life by providing us with beneficial agency to relieve suffering. Since the concept of considering something meaningful in life is subjective, meaningfulness is interpreted differently for every human. Like suffering, many philosophers have different definitions for what is good in life, or what objects, thoughts, events, and experiences actually make life meaningful or invoke a sense of purpose. Not all meaningful components to life lead to an ultimate goal or pursuit, but they are still notable as they still provide a sense of fulfillment to those who indulge in them. The Greek philosopher
Epicurus believed that the fulfillment of life could be achieved by pursuing simple mental and physical pleasures. Conversely, the stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius believed that the source of fulfillment was not the pursuit of pleasure, but the expression of virtuous behavior and self-discipline. Other philosophers such as Aristotle believed that the fulfillment of life was rooted in exercising one's intellectual and moral capacities to achieve excellence. The criteria for defining what makes life fulfilling is very broad and subjective, but the nature of all these qualities allows for humans to choose what they want to hold as meaningful. However, while Epicurus proposed that the pursuit of pleasures can lead to the feeling of fulfillment, some may argue that a hedonistic approach on life can overlook the complex nature of human agency and fail to address deeper sources of fulfillment. Similarly, while Marcus Aurelius advocated for the expression of virtues and self-discipline as the source of fulfillment, some may question if the denial of pleasure and pain adequately represents the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences. Overall, the qualities that lead to feelings of fulfillment are almost always beneficial in nature. The act of giving food to the homeless is a humanitarian act by nature, but the intentions behind the act are what make it significant. Let's assume that you fed a homeless man because you deliberately wanted to

help him. Is the act significant? Some may say that the act is significant because, you, a conscious deliberating human, chose to spend your resources and time on someone who is in a worse state than you are. Now, let's assume that a friend sent you to feed said homeless man, and begrudgingly, you did as they said. Is the act still significant? Perhaps the main interest was not the homeless man's wellbeing, but the act itself still shows that you were willing to perform the act even if you were conscious in not wanting to. In nature, the act of charity is an unusual thing because it goes against the "survival of the fittest" model where organisms must constantly compete for resources in order to ensure their survival. Since humans are capable of acknowledging their own suffering and defining what is meaningful to them, some may believe that meaningfulness derives from the intentional act of helping others and going against egoistic lifestyles. Conversely, some may believe that their lives are already meaningful, and choosing to engage in humanitarianism is simply a byproduct of whatever fulfills their lives. choosing to engage in humanitarianism is simply a byproduct of whatever fulfills their lives.

In his essay titled "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus describes how Sisyphus' punishment can be used as a metaphor for the human condition. The act of rolling a stone that will never reach the top of a mountain is absurd, because there is a clear goal that is never achieved by Sisyphus. The cruelty of the punishment is characterized by Sisyphus' inability to change his circumstances and find meaning in his task. In spite of this, Camus famously stated that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy." In other words, although Sisyphus is constantly fighting a literal uphill battle, his efforts are not in vain so long as he is aware and fulfilled in doing the task. Though the situation is dire for Sisyphus, he will continue to push the boulder so long as it is meaningful to him. As humans, we are capable of getting through tragedies and absurdities in life because we have an agency that allows us to weigh our circumstances and choose how we want to cope with them. Philosophical suicide was a term created by Camus that describes when an individual escapes absurdity by becoming ignorant through a comforting belief system. When choosing philosophical suicide, one removes the burdens of life by deliberately

choosing to evade the absurdity of life in favor of a naïve lifestyle.. Camus advocated against philosophical suicide because it does not properly address absurdity for what it is, and it instead leads the individual to seek belief systems that do not lead to awareness and integrity. If we choose to revolt against absurdity, we wade against its tide and find meaning through our own agency without the direct support of external systems. It is the freedom in the ability to choose what we want to do in response to suffering that showcases the potential of the human consciousness. Even in the most unfortunate circumstances, the indomitable human spirit is capable of pursuing lifelong desires, virtues, pleasures, and experiences because the intention alone is enough to drive us forward and away from philosophical suicide. When we imagine Sisyphus happy, it does not change his situation, but

unlike him, humans are capable of choosing if they want to push the boulder or not.

Life is an unforgiving and unavoidable force–and all experiences, achievements, ideas, and efforts of men will eventually be consumed by death. Nevertheless, the greatest opposition to these forces is to simply live life and create meaning that is a product of our conscious agency. Meaningfulness in life is characterized by experiences produced by conscious and deliberate acts and thoughts that are in alignment with a personal mission to feel fulfillment in life. With beneficial agency, humans are capable of ridding themselves of natural, selfish desires to maintain themselves in favor of supporting the welfare of many individuals. The execution of beneficial agency can also be used to support individuals experiencing the throes of life because it can provide hope and a sense of motivation to continue pursuing goals and missions even in an inherently meaningless life. The human condition and its constant struggle is a testament on how consciousness wrestles with the absurdity of existence, and the beneficial agency derived from these deliberations allows humans to work for a future that prioritizes their wellbeing and alleviation of suffering. Therefore, meaningfulness is not only used by conscious individuals to revolt against life, but it is also a tool to help others gain the strength to not commit philosophical suicide when faced with the hardships of life. Through the perception of events and experiences and the creation of ideas and pursuits, humans have a freedom that other beings cannot comprehend . This freedom is a double-edged sword because it burdens humans with existential dread, but it also offers the ability to grow, resist, and find meaning in an absurd existence.

THE ETHICS OF IMMIGRATION:

WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

SABRINA PEREIRA

When I was thirteen, my dream of coming to the United States finally came to fruition. From traveling to 28 states in two months, I left the US, falling in love with the country more, hoping to return to pursue my dream of getting my degree. Seven years later, that dream became a reality. But there was something different about this dream- I was not a tourist anymore.

There was something so alienating about the juxtaposition of feeling like a citizen while, in the eyes of some, I was "just an immigrant" –or like the man who sold Philly steaks called me, an "outsider–"

Being so far away from my loved ones and not having anyone to speak Malayalam with truly reinforced various, distinct, and salient situational experiences of being in the role of an "outsider. This background of my personal experience with immigration provided me with invaluable insight into the core ethics that underlie this complex discourse. In this article, I attempt to draw an ethical line on immigration, specifically related to entry into a host country which should lead to citizenship. I divide these into five main entry classifications for a host country by considering some ethical frameworks, such as utilitarianism, distributive justice, and virtue ethics. These classifications include education, need-based entry, family ties, refugee, and length of stay.

The first classification is the education-based classification. In this category, qualified students from around the world may be allowed to enter the host country to complete their education. Qualified students may have to prove an intent to pursue an education, have enough monetary funds for their education, have a living situation, etc. These qualified students contribute directly to the host country's economy through tuition, paying rent and taxes, or indirectly by promoting global networks and making the host country look like a suitable place for education. Additionally, the host country could benefit from these students because it helps to increase the quality of the education system by being able to draw from a more extensive and diverse pool of potential students. However, many incoming students may be burdened with assimilating into a new culture and other financial burdens that may hinder their experience in the host country. This is why it is vital to have leniency {because that leniency allows some kind of benefit to both parties to emerge/develop} in the qualifications and existing laws in the host country that make these experiences more seamless.

The second classification is based on the needs of the host country. An example that I could think of is job vacancies. It can help increase the quality of the host country's economy by drawing from a larger and more diverse pool of workers. The host country could benefit from specific skills, innovations, and productivity pertaining to the immigrant's cultures and values. Why would the host country want that? Why wouldn't it? A silly example of an innovation I am reminded of is during my recent travel to Morocco. The traditional Berber lipstick of Morocco comes in a bell-shaped clay container that contains the lipstick in a very solid state. To activate the lipstick, one must apply moisture (usually water) using one's fingertips and then apply it to one's lips. To many, it is just a different culture, but to me, it was so much more than that. I was impressed not only by this technique but also realized that this makes the lipstick last longer than the regular stick lipstick, which either breaks off or the liquid lipstick that usually dries up in less than a year. So let me ask the question once again. Why wouldn't a host country benefit from the different cultural innovations that an immigrant brings to the table?

The third classification is solely based on family ties in the host country. This includes immediate family and other family members that show close-knit relationships. This would ensure that the host country is not the reason why a family gets separated overseas. There are many nuances regarding this category, and the biggest question that may arise is whether birthright citizenship should be allowed. My answer is yes, it should be, along with automatic citizenship to the parent or guardian if they entered the host country legally. Why should an irresponsible parent who knew that there would be separation if they gave birth in a host country be given that privilege? Is it fair that a parent gets to skip the line to citizenship by

using their newborn? It is absolutely not right to use a baby as the means to an end, but the baby has so much to lose if he/she gets separated from their parents and so much to gain if they are together. This also reinforces a good value in the host country because it is intrinsically good to have families together.

The fourth classification is refugee entry. This would mean ensuring the host country helps refugees regardless of political ties. I think of this category like how I would feel helping a family member instead of a stranger. Helping a family is almost like an obligation, but helping a stranger is not one. If you are like me, helping a stranger feels better than helping a family member because it speaks to your moral values. Similarly, helping a refugee would say a lot about the host country's values to a p oint where the ethical standings of the country would be increased significantly. In addition, the stories of refugees serve as the first information about crucial historical events and may motivate the host country's citizens. This also helps the host country counter any allegations of whataboutism during international conflicts where the host country will have much credibility.

The final classification is the length of stay in the host country. In this category, I exclude any immigrant who enters the country illegally. An immigrant who has entered the host country and stayed there for a good period has demonstrated loyalty to the host country and has successfully immersed in the host country's culture. By living in the host country for several years, the immigrant will probably develop political knowledge that pertains to their daily life, which is why the path to citizenship makes them informed voters. Calculating the right amount of time to determine eligibility may be solved by looking at records of how long the immigrants from individual countries take to assimilate into the host country's culture. Alternatively, one could look at this on a case-by-case basis. One of the many shocks I received from Americans was when I told them I had been in the country only for 4 months. Many Americans were astonished by my seamless "good English." My privilege of attending a private school with peers from around the world and my father's strict enforcement of only speaking English at home added to this

uniqueness. Not every immigrant gets such a privilege, so I am inclined towards a case-by-case determination of what constitutes a sufficient amount for length of stay.

In the education classification, I come to the ethical standard by determining a student's intent to go to the host country for their education. It is almost certain that a student who studies abroad is doing so because they either want to get an education unavailable in their host country or they want to study in the host country to understand it better to have their future in the host country. In addition to their intent, the benefits and gains they bring to the host country are immense, and if they want to continue to stay in the host country, it is ethical because it helps both parties. In the need-based category, while it looks like the host country is at an advantage, the immigrants who fill these spots may not have had the opportunity to take the education route, or their life course may have changed. The host country may offer opportunities they would not receive in their home country. This is a win-win situation. In the family-based category, I attempt to bring good values to the host country by minimizing or completely eradicating the separation of immediate family members. By doing so, the host country sends a positive message to its citizens and other countries; that family is valued. In the category based on refugee status, I draw a similar line to that of the family-based category. Accepting

refugees to a host country, regardless of political ties, sends a very uniquely positive message; the host country is willing to help immigrants if something terrible happens to them, especially if it is out o f their control. The final classification involving the period of stay comprises either statistical analysis of a country or individual considerations of how quickly an immigrant acclimates to the host country's culture. This includes language, political knowledge, etc. Having an immigrant perspective on the host country's political needs will make the host country even better for top attractive immigration countries. At the same time, it also rewards immigrants who are determined and loyal to the host country and take the time to learn a culture they were not raised in.
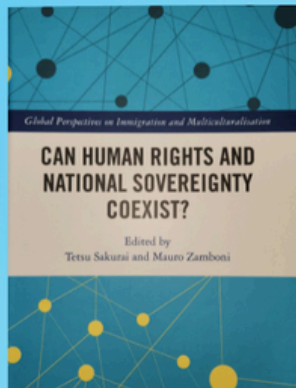
Suppose the existing categories are not cumbersome for an immigrant to enter a host country; the number of illegal entries will decrease, making it easier for immigrants to emigrate legally. These five classifications, through the lens of utilitarianism, distributive justice, and virtue ethics, attempt to balance the interests of the host countries with the individual interests of the immigrant. In this attempt, I believe that the interests of the host country exceed, to some extent, the interests of the immigrant. However, I believe that the journey of an immigrant in the host country will eventually bring fruitful benefits for the immigrant. In doing so, I am hopeful that an immigrant who contributes so much to a host country does not have to feel like an outsider.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION: A PANEL DISCUSSION

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- **12:10 PM -** Panel 1 presentations
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- **1:00 PM -** Panel 2 presentations
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- **1:50 PM -** Closing remarks

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- Prof. Valeria Gomez, Assistant Professor of Law & Director, Immigrant Rights Clinic, The University of Baltimore

- Prof. Joshua Kassner, Professor of Philosophy, Yale Gordon College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Baltimore

- Prof. Elizabeth Keyes, Professor of Law, The University of Baltimore

- Prof. Jennica Larrison, Associate Professor, School of Public and International Affairs, The University of Baltimore

- Catherine Znamirowski, Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Public Administration, University of Baltimore

- Prof. Steven Scalet, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Hoffberger Center for Ethical Engagement, Yale Gordon College of Arts and Sciences, The University of Baltimore

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EXISTENTIALISM AND RHETORICAL ETHICS:
TAKING ACCOUNTABILITY

TAKAMIRA WILLIAMS

Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, has historically played a dual role acting simultaneously as a tool for healing societal rifts and as a weapon in the arsenal of conflict. Aristotle, one of the foremost thinkers of ancient Greece, famously described rhetoric as the ability to identify in any situation the most effective means of persuasion. This definition underscores the inherent power of rhetorical skill to shape opinions and influence actions across a broad spectrum of contexts. However, the modern landscape of political discourse reveals a troubling shift in the application of rhetorical strategies, where the balance among Aristotle's three pillars of persuasion—ethos (credibility), logos (logical reasoning), and pathos (emotional appeal)—has tilted decidedly toward the latter. Pathos has not merely overshadowed ethos and logos but has done so in a way that deepens existing divisions rather than bridging them. This phenomenon, known as "affective polarization," is marked not by mere differences in opinion but by profound emotional divisions that are rooted more in group identities than in ideological beliefs. Such a climate raises critical questions about the role of the individual in a society where they are constantly subjected to persuasive efforts that prioritize emotional manipulation over factual or ethical correctness. By exploring the implications of this shift towards pathos-dominated rhetoric, I argue for a rebalanced use of Aristotle's triadic approach and propose an existentialistic perspective for individuals in critically engaging with rhetoric, encouraging a healthier, more informed public discourse.

The potent emotional appeal in modern rhetoric, while effectively capturing attention, often overshadows factual integrity and logical reasoning. The focus on the emotive aspect of rhetoric is hardly accidental. In an era of 280-character tweets and soundbites, the emotional punch of a message often trumps its factual accuracy or logical coherence. This development reflects shrinking attention spans, and a response to the media environment that rewards engagement over enlightenment. The problem with this shift is that while pathos can be tremendously effective in capturing attention, it can also establish divisions. When persuasion is primarily emotional, it reinforces group identities and intensifies us-versus-them mentalities. However, the emotional responses elicited by such rhetoric shadow a deeper, existential challenge: the necessity for individuals to confront and understand their own lived experiences to combat misinformation and disinformation.

When speaking of misinformation and disinformation, the blame is often placed squarely on the shoulder of persuaders or on media, politicians, and corporations as the places where the persuaders live. It is often overlooked that the blame may, in some capacity , reside with the persuaded. The persuaded are often looked at persons who have fallen victim, been "dooped," or deluded into belief of rhetoric. While it is understood the ethical responsibility of rhetoricians, the focus on the responsibility of the persuaded opens a crucial, though often overlooked, dimension of rhetorical ethics: the ethical obligation of the audience to engage critically with persuasive messages. Rhetoric, traditionally concerned with the effectiveness of persuasion, also implies a reciprocal relationship between the speaker and the audience. This relationship is not merely manipulative; it is dialectical, meaning that the audience is not just passively absorbing information but actively interpreting and responding to it.

Existentialism, a philosophy deeply concerned with individual agency and personal experience, teaches us that authenticity arises from confronting our own realities and the subjective interpretations we bring to our experiences. By applying this thought, individuals can become more critically aware of how their emotions and biases influence their acceptance of information. This self-awareness is necessary in an era where emotional rhetoric often exploits these very biases to divide cultures and reinforce group identities. Expanding the scope of rhetorical ethics beyond the responsibility of the speaker to uphold truth and integrity calls on the audience to participate in ethical discourse, challenging them to scrutinize not only the truthfulness of the information presented but also the intent behind it and the logic that supports it. Individuals have the freedom to choose, and with this freedom comes the weighty responsibility of those choices, including how we engage with and interpret information, challenging us to reconsider our roles not just as passive recipients of information but as active participants in the creation of our own realities. We must recognize that our interpretations of facts, news, and rhetoric fundamentally shape our experience of the world. When we accept information without critical engagement, we are not merely being deceived by external forces; we are, in a sense, deceiving ourselves. By having an awareness that our engagement with information reflects our existential freedom, we can develop a more discerning, responsible approach to the narratives that shape our lives. In addition, we create a more dynamic and democratic form of public discourse, where every individual's engagement with rhetoric is not only a personal ethical challenge but a civic duty, encouraging a more conscientious public, where both speakers and listeners bear the responsibility for maintaining the integrity and health of their communicative environment.

In conclusion, as we grapple with the escalating influence of emotionally charged rhetoric in today's discourse, it becomes imperative to adopt a more existential and ethical approach to how we both deliver and receive information. The prevalent shift towards pathos-heavy persuasion not only exacerbates societal divides but also challenges our personal integrity by encouraging passive acceptance overactive, critical engagement. By understanding the impact of rhetoric on our perceptions and actions, we can foster a more conscientious communicative environment, but it requires a dual commitment: speakers must strive to balance emotional appeal with factual accuracy and logical coherence, and listeners must actively interrogate the intent, logic, and truthfulness of the messages they receive. Embracing this approach will not only enhance the quality of public discourse and empower individuals to bridge the affective polarizations that currently fragment our social fabric. Thus, the ancient art of rhetoric, reinvigorated with a focus on existential authenticity and ethical engagement, holds the potential to transform modern challenges into opportunities for greater understanding and collaboration in our collective pursuit of truth.

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