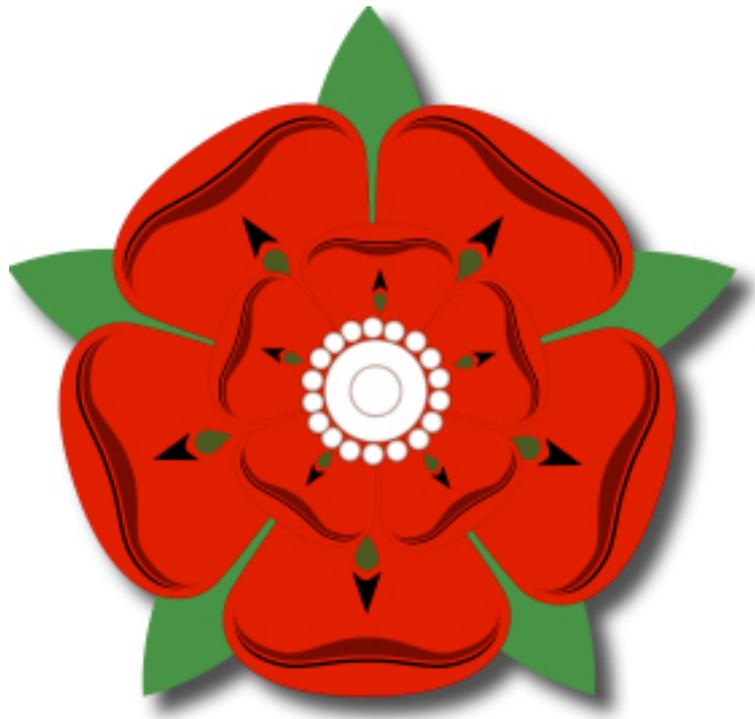


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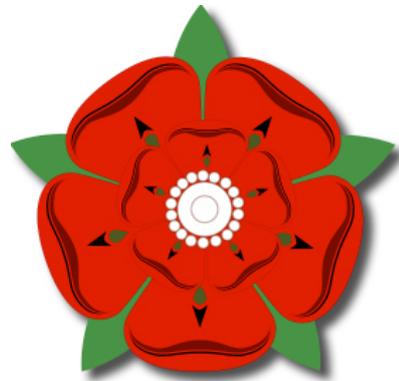
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Editorial

Welcome to the first publication of the Lancaster Journal of Philosophy – a peer-reviewed journal, dedicated to recognising those who demonstrate excellence and originality within the study of philosophy. This journal prides itself with creating the opportunity for students and non-students alike to publish their work within a forum of discussion regarding any philosophical discipline. I sincerely hope this is the first of many publications to come, attracting more and more readers interested in philosophy, no matter how fleeting this interest might be, to actively engage with the arguments presented in this journal.

While one may look feverishly on what the future might hold for this journal, I must give an incredible amount of thanks to all those that have contributed to this very first issue. To begin, I am extremely grateful for the support and guidance by the sub-editors of the journal. Without their time and effort reviewing others work and providing assistance it is possible the idea for this journal would have remained just that – an idea. Of course, this journal would not be here unless it had not received such a strong response from those students that kindly submitted their work for others to read and debate over the many arguments they have provided.

This issue holds four papers, each presenting original work within different philosophical fields. We begin with an opening by Oliver Thorne, with his monologue questioning the very foundation of what a university is and what its nature consists of. This paper does not seek to give a socio-historic analysis, however; Thorne presses deeper, asking a simple, but exceedingly loaded question: what does it mean to be a student? Does it exist? If so, in what form? Thorne's raw philosophising provokes an interesting topic that is perhaps not as intricately looked upon as it probably should.

Following this is a paper that I have written specifically for the journal. I am primarily focused on the study of environmental philosophy, to which, I believe, is a philosophical branch that is not discussed as often as it needs to be within the university walls. Within this paper I argue that the fundamental premise of two major environmental ethical theories – biocentrism and ecocentrism – is flawed. I provide a polemic addressing how this premise, named the teleological argument, is a weak theoretical attempt to extend the boundaries of moral consideration to the nonhuman realm.

Environmental philosophy is a subject that is closely connected with many other philosophical disciplines. Daniil Bachkirov demonstrates this point perfectly, with his paper giving an analysis of the debate whether Buddhist scripture can provide the foundations for a suitable environmental ethic. Bachkirov points out that this debate has been fruitless right from the start, with both sides of the argument failing to identify what is meant by critical words such as 'environmentalism', and even what 'Buddhism' means. As such, this debate will forever be in stalemate, with both sides completely misunderstanding what each other has to say. Bachkirov finishes his paper by attempting to give a reconciliation of both parties.

Lastly, turning away from environmental philosophy, David Holt gives an entertaining aesthetic philosophical account of why *The Beach Boys* album *Pet Sounds* should be considered as great art. Firstly, Holt lays the foundations of four key specifications to understand what it means for a piece of art to be considered great. Holt then applies this to *Pet Sounds*, and analyses why this 1960s album might be considered great art along with the symphonies of Wagner and Beethoven.

The ending section of this journal gives details of how to submit a paper to be reviewed for the next journal publication next spring. I hope the reader enjoys not only just reading the pieces within this first journal publication, but also actively discussing them with others. I deeply encourage the reader to consider submitting a paper of their own towards the next journal, especially if they seek to respond to any of the pieces in this journal that they may

seek to argue against, or even reinforce. It is this kind of discussion that we wish to stimulate, creating a livelier interest within the study of philosophy.

Thomas E. Randall

Head Editor of the Lancaster Journal of Philosophy

A Philosophical Monograph Questioning the University

Oliver Thorne

What is the University? Why does it exist? How does it work? These are some of the questions I pose myself here in an unsystematic manner without a partner, without a discussant or a reference. Perhaps I could add to these beginning questions, asking, more importantly, what is it to *be* a student? What is the being of a student perhaps? Or more precisely what is it to be-come a student, and what is becoming-student?

Here what I write is at one and the same time an opinion and not an opinion. Philosophy is historically opposed to mere *doxa* (common opinion) in favour of *episteme* (knowledge or reasoned truth). Here what I write is neither, for what I write is not common opinion, and not reasoned truth; this is unless it is, on the one hand, a singular truth among many - a philosophical position I do not subscribe to - or on the other hand reason, which results in a truth of reason, of thought-process, in-line with the accepted tradition of *logos*. But then, how do we think between tradition and the present? How do we think between opinion and knowledge? How do we think the singular, in the Universal? The student in the University. The future of the University. The University-becoming. Here then, what I write is an attempt at once not reasoned or opinionated but simply problematising, questioning, suggesting, opening up space to think. If that is not philosophical, then what is?

I could of course begin by plotting the history of the development of the University - how it began, where it began, how it has changed, why it has changed. What were the socio-historical conditions that have influenced it, driven it to be what it is. I could, thereby, begin to answer some of the proposed questions. What makes a University? Is it an institution? A government run body for the dissemination of education? A structured network of power centres, within and without of other power centres, for the production of workers? For the production of thinkers? So many questions, and many of them leading to potentially (likely) cynical outcomes. But here I pose *myself* a question; not history, not society, not the University, although I am not adverse to the inclusion and influence of the socio-historic - and certainly not unaware of the socially constructed nature of our thoughts.

If I invert the perspective, and ask can we have an abstract entity that is a student? If I pose this question then surely I could offer a rigorous definition as an answer: a simple task of designating *the* student with an adequate definition, a term which represents the (sub/ob)ject of *a* (dead) student. What is this abstract thing that apparently grounds other things within it? Is the University a fixed entity (dead)? Or is it always in a state of dying and being-reborn (perpetually and dramatically)? Who embodies the University?

What about a quantitative or statistical approach? The number of students is falling. What does this tell me about the University? If we have fewer students, less plurality, do we have less or more as a student? Is the being of a student dependent on the number of students? Can we calculate what it is to *be a* student by collating data on students? Interviewing students? Recording endless details about students and then analysing it? A student is not a number among many; it is not one among others that defines itself according to those others and the simple data of the collective. In other words, the University is not a collection of students. What about lecturers, administration, facilities, cleaners, any general staff, professors? Are we all simply historical contingencies? Are we lost in words? Are we simply numbers to be calculated?

What does it mean then to *be* a student, in my singularity, and yet in the body of students, as the University? This is the core question, for it answers from both ground and sky the between of the problem: the becoming. To become, becoming-student is a dynamic-being. A movement beyond definitions, abstractions, and knowing; beyond history, institutions,

fixtures and fittings; and beyond statistics, surveys and numbers. Moreover, it moves beyond blaming and irresponsibility and it brings to life the becoming of the University as a fluid, living organisation.

By now I hope it becomes clear that this monograph is about questions: questions posed about/to myself, about/to the University. If I am *a* student (?), and *a* part (?) of *a* University (?), this is the only place to begin to look for answers. It matters that there is a plurality of students, it matters that there is a history, it matters that there are staff, organisation, institutions within institutions, power centres; but what matters most is the body of the University, the student body, my body, this body, the being-here-student, the becoming(s – of/a) student(s). I cannot look outside myself for a definition of what it means to be a student, or look to another student. I do not deny the necessary relationality of (a) student(s) to each other and all of the above-mentioned aspects. In fact my point is exactly relationality, living relations within all of these aspects, leading to responsibility as the living University - the student-becoming and the University-becoming as a plurality of becoming(s).

The University *is* (becomes) what a student makes it. It is in the making. It is destined from the becoming of the student. It must primarily be about thinking as a student. ‘Learning’ to think, but of course not limited to this. In fact this cannot take place without: being as activity, being as producing, being as inter-being, being as responsibility, being as care, being as a becoming, always and now.

It appears, from experience in the University, that there is something wrong with it. This is not a bad thing. This ‘something wrong’ shows me at least two things: a fundamental problem of the University, and a fundamental problem for myself as *a* student. Any complaint levelled at the University is inevitably a complaint levelled at my self. If it is not, then it is merely an abdication of responsibility for the actuality of the place I am in. Of course, I can argue we are in the University that has been left for us by those that have gone before us, but this historical abdication of responsibility does not tell me who I am, here now, in this University. It in fact merely shifts the blame: it is the government’s fault, the Vice Chancellor, anyone but me, anyone but *a* student’s. If I am unhappy with the University, what should I do? What acts can I make which change the being of the University? Can I begin with the University? Can I take hold of an abstract entity and remake it? Can I look up and shake my hand at it, as if it is like a man in the sky, and demand justice?

In the commodification of the University, less money may be available for *a* student; the cost of the University place may go up (or down) as it has done so far. Therefore, perhaps I can exercise consumer rights? After all, I now pay for the University. I, as *a* student, have a right to a certain quality, according to a certain amount that I borrow (usually) and am paid to the University. It is an external arbiter, a quantifier, but what does this guarantee me? What am I given (or sold) by the University? Education? But if I begin to quantify my education, and valorise it, I am already moving further away from *the sense* of a University, of being *a* student. I am now in the world of business, consumers, marketing and advertising. I have consumer rights, not student rights. I am part of a business not a University. As a consumer, I am anonymous. My rights are only determined by my purchase power. I, as a student, am therefore lost and so is the University. *I am sold to myself as a product of myself!* What does this show me? What space is available to a student who sees this fact? There are many, if I become thoughtful.

I have no grounds to argue against the University in financial terms. It used to be free! So, what? It isn’t any more. Where we find ourselves now is in *a* University, as *a* paying student. I have a choice here to *not* be *a* consumer - that is all. As a student I remain closer to my right as part of a University. As a consumer I make the University a business; I am complicit in its commodification. And in its commodification the University loses its borders, and dissolved into the business world. As a student I lose myself if I claim to have the rights

of a consumer. I move away from a dynamic of student-becoming. I lose my potential to becoming, a potential given to me by the very same commodification; instead I am sold a student package and I objectify myself as a product.

Hand in hand, with the commodification of the University and of myself as a student, is the vocational. In the 1990's, alongside the emergence of fees, the vocational colleges 'up(down)graded' to Universities. The two places – not the only two places – became sites of higher vocational education: one place. I attend a University, and I am no longer a student; I am now a trainee, and I become a worker. *I am produced in order to produce: I pay to work.* It is not a hard and fast split; there is a margin of difference, and there will always be gaps, spaces for exploration. But this loss of a division in the location of vocation and research - a well known divide which need not be hierarchical, dualistic or elitist - was the beginning of the end of independent research and academia, which whispers to us from the etymology-genealogy of the word. I suggest, as a student that I now lose the potential for becoming-student and instead gain the potential to be a worker: a product of the University factory. It had that potential prior to the 'vocationalisation' but not to the same degree. Now, it is the predominant potentiality. I am not nostalgic, or indulging in elite fantasy here. I am asking, does the University produce thinkers, does it produce working-thinkers, or does it produce workers? It is a precarious balancing in the face of that which is the antithesis to the actual purpose of our being here: student-becoming. The vocational, therefore, shows up similar spaces for the liberation of student-becoming as commodification does.

So where do I stand as a student, as this student? Surprisingly there is space within this institution. I stand, therefore, beyond the strictures and in relation to space, in relation to gaps in the University. These spaces offer potential for student-becoming. Can there be a University-in-becoming? These spaces, or gaps exist but what do they mean for a student now? They are spaces of potential for making, thinking, being, becoming, within a seemingly fixed structure that is essentially ungrounded without these very spaces and gaps. A structure built on its fluid body and the spaces between its pillars, in the junctures, the meetings, the gifts and the voluntary. In the spaces and gaps between the concrete foundations, stone pillars and the iron beams.

When I speak of spaces and gaps I mean several things. Let us take an example relating to the problem of numbers and anonymity. When I submit a piece of work anonymously I no longer have a personal relationship with my seminar tutor, a postgraduate or academic, a living being, a living relation, a potential of becoming. If I write a piece of work and leave a number there at the top do I not distance myself from those who are here to help me? Do I not also distance myself from who I am? Do I not limit my potential for becoming? And, do I not erase a potential for an inter-relation, a history? Am I not distanced through a rule, by a guideline from those who are also in this institution? Those who are also put to service, strained by time and money, who are also ordered numerically, made into University shopkeepers? Moreover, do we not take away the responsibility and trust involved in a student-teacher, teacher-student relationship - the most vital inter-relationship for a living University? Here, among us, a space/gap opens up, due to a regulation that is there to protect a student to his/her right of impartiality. *A rule creates a space for potential-becomings.* What about a right to partiality? What about a right to communication? A right not to be hidden. A right to relationality: being a student in relation to a tutor, a becoming through a relating, a potential for becoming-student.

These spaces/gaps exist throughout the University. This is a minor example. Others could be easily demonstrated if we looked at student employment, student housing, encroaching technology, departmentalisation, specialisation, or financial aid to cite just a few of many more possible examples. All of them take away the potential of a thoroughly run student body, which in its partiality has a force of becoming-student which relates to the

University as body of living people - and so, as (a) part(s) of the University-becoming, a living fluid organisation of people.

A second example is the library. It is a space that calls out in so many ways; there are so many gaps in this single site, the heart of the scholarly University. So many potentials for becoming: technological, financial, library aides, silence. Only three years ago I picked up and returned my books with a person. I spoke to someone, got to know someone, made a friendly relation with another human being: a right to relationality now lost. Now, I check books out on a machine with a number; it is convenient, it is simple, it is functional. Again this number, what does it mean? It is missing something. It is a space or gap, where human presence, another becoming is absent. I know this because I have experienced it and it has changed. It is now not as it was, and it cannot go back. But this is not a case of nostalgia. It is a recognition of a need to make a greater effort to meet, greet, speak or thank another living being in a space that is losing its identity as a space of reading, writing, storing and borrowing of paper books - a space of research. What if this never arises or becomes apparent? For this gap shows up now, but in the next years, when no student recollects the relationality of being-in the library, how can it appear as a gap then? Spaces and gaps too are in a state of becoming. They are not fixed - can they be fixed?

What of the silent dimension in the library? The most sacred of gaps, the one that is made apparent through ever-increasing noise. *Noise as the problem that shows up the absence of silence*. Do you remember when the library was silent? A place to gather thoughts, to concentrate, to read intently, fundamental assemblages of what it is to be *a* student-becoming. The library, a place of silence, a place of thoughtfulness, a place for thinking and becoming-student will soon be forgotten. What new space, or gap will open up to allow the next student/trainee/thinker/worker potentiality to recollect the most vital organ of the University? A place of becoming respectful, peaceful, gathered. A site to see what one has become.

Spaces and gaps exist. Lecturers and professors are strained. Postgraduates are strained. Undergraduates are strained. Administration is strained. Each in different ways and each in a way that separates them instead of uniting them towards a communality: the University-becoming! What can be done? Who is responsible? As this student, only this student can be responsible. What can be done? Well, what spaces or gaps are there which are calling out? What spaces forgotten? What junctures are waiting to be met? What lies at the heart of this institution that drives most of us *to be* here? What do you see? I know why I came here, and now I start to see my responsibility as a student-becoming. Then, surprisingly, I see the gaps that appear and ask to be taken up. When I do this, I feel what it means to *be* a student as *a* becoming, to move as *a* student, in *a* body of students, as *a* dynamic living University-becoming. This is not political; it is philosophical to the core. It is, moreover, a humbling experience.

Some body once said, 'become what you are'. To become what I am, a paradox, a dynamic being. To become what I am is also to be a becoming. Here I have suggested four modes of being-in the University, four relations to the institution. A socio-historical relation, a credit-debtor (vocation) relation, a numerical relation, and a becoming relation. In fact, all of the first three are being-relations, fixed by something, static, a locked relation which if not renewed simply dies: as the only living thing which is fixed/certain is death. The fourth is the living relation, because it asks for something from itself, it asks to (be)come without knowing what it *will be*, only that it will become. It *will be* as *a* becoming. I fear I am losing the reader. I fear most that I am losing the becoming relationality of *a* student to/as *a* University.

All things are continually in flux, five years from now who knows what the University will be. This brings uncertainty and anxiety; it is an unhealthy University, with unhealthy (poor) students, and strained assemblages. This is how it is. It is how it has always been. The University is always becoming. Therefore, perhaps you ask: what am I to do? I have

suggested seeing the gaps and spaces within the fixed institution as junctures available for becoming-student. This can only be done by becoming-student, a small shift that refuses the ordinary three modes of being in the University, the ones given on a plate, the ones which fix a student instead of liberating a student to becoming.

This fourth choice is uncertain, and yet, it offers the most certainty for becoming-student, and not simply reducing myself to defining, being produced, numbering, consuming that becoming which I am. On the one hand, our becoming is stolen from *us*, if we are not vigilant. On the other, it is given to us, as a privilege, as a gift, as a voluntary endeavour for our becoming. Irrespective of how it *is* it can be taken up through gaps and spaces leading to a liberating student experience. A student can become what a student is. It is a singular affair, with an indissoluble communality. It is everything a *we* needs to be what it *is* in relation to a thinking, caring, acting, living University. It is the beginning of responsibility, the beginning of becoming that which I can never become - as it is always in the face of that which threatens most that one can be thankful.

Environmental Philosophy and the Teleological Argument: A Polemic¹

Thomas E. Randall

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to critique the fundamental premise of two distinct, yet analogous, environmental ethical theories: biocentrism (in both its individualistic and pluralistic approaches) and ecocentrism. This premise is named the teleological argument – a line of reasoning that, understood within an environmental philosophical context, has been used to attribute intrinsic value to biological organisms, and holistic environmental entities. This paper argues that the teleological argument is a weak theoretical attempt to extend the boundaries of moral consideration to the nonhuman realm; consequently, if this paper's argumentation is accepted, this raises severe concerns about the legitimacy of both biocentrism and ecocentrism in being serious contenders as coherent environmental ethical theories.

I. Introduction

Within this paper, I argue that the teleological argument, understood within an environmental philosophical context, is a weak theoretical attempt to attribute intrinsic value to biological organisms, and holistic environmental entities. As the teleological argument characterises the fundamental premise of biocentrism (in both its individualistic and pluralistic approaches) and ecocentrism, my following critique draws attention to the legitimacy of these two perspectives in being serious contenders as coherent environmental ethical theories. For if my following argumentum is accepted, this ultimately undermines the aforementioned philosophical accounts on how the environment ought to be treated, or even perceived as being.

In arguing my point, I shall begin by outlining the teleological argument and its importance to the theoretical underpinning of biocentrism and ecocentrism, making distinct the argument's differential use quite clear. Subsequently, I attack the teleological argument from two angles: the first focuses on the idea that interpreting an organism or holistic environmental entity in a teleological manner raises awkward conclusions that demonstrate the absurdity of its usage; the second regards the erroneous use of metaphoric language within the above two environmental ethical theories that constructs the perceived utility of the teleological argument within their approach.

II. Environmental Ethics and Intrinsic Value

To identify how the teleological argument forms the basis of these two environmental ethical theories, it is first important to elucidate the disparity and the commonalities that exist between biocentrism and ecocentrism to exemplify this. Indeed, what draws these two theories away from each other, yet what leads both to make use of the teleological argument, is the interpretation of which environmental entity possesses intrinsic value, and thus what ought to be morally considered.

Biocentrism, simply defined, is an ethical theory that attributes intrinsic value to all biological organisms. As stated in the introduction, biocentrism splits into two main factions: biocentric individualism and biocentric pluralism, with this partition purely centred upon which environmental entities are to be perceived as being intrinsically valuable. The

¹ Paper originally published in the *British Journal of Undergraduate Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (1), 2013.

individualist account argues in favour of all individual biological organisms possessing intrinsic value, but not the sum of their collective group. As Paul Taylor writes within *Respect for Nature*:

*The population has no good of its own, independently of the good of its members. To promote or protect the population's good [...] does not mean that the good of every one of its members is also promoted and protected.*²

Interestingly, biocentric pluralism develops as a response to Taylor's sole focus on the intrinsic value of the individual organism. James Sterba provides a critique of Taylor in this manner, stating that "[s]pecies can be benefited and harmed and have a good of their own, and so qualify on Taylor's view as moral subjects."³ As such, the biocentric pluralist emphasises the intrinsic worth of larger environmental entities, as compared to an individualist account that ascribes none whatsoever.

Ecocentrism, though closely inferred as relating to biocentric pluralism, "goes beyond biocentrism", by which is meant, according to Stan Rowe, that:

*[T]he whole ecosphere is even more significant and consequential: more inclusive, more complex, more integrated, more creative, more beautiful, more mysterious, and older than time.*⁴

Thus, ecocentrism provides an almost spiritual account as to how the environment ought to be perceived, to be contrasted with a far more scientifically grounded biocentric theory.⁵ The entire ecosystem is to be attributed intrinsic value in the maintenance and stability of its existence, ahead of smaller considered environmental entities.

Despite this division, both theories originate from the same antagonistic position against what can be seen as the prevailing environmental ethical discourse of anthropocentrism. Such unease from the biocentric and ecocentric outlook of anthropocentric thought develops out of the joint belief that this dominant environmental ethic exhibits an inadequate approach in understanding how humans ought to interact with the natural environment. This concern regards the anthropocentric perspective that only humans are to be attributed intrinsic value; consequently, nonhuman biological organisms, and holistic environmental entities, have solely instrumental worth.⁶ Moral consideration is granted only towards the beneficiary of human beings, and to none other.

Such an approach, it is argued by biocentrists and ecocentrists, has been the root cause of the vast number of environmental issues throughout human history. Both these two environmental ethical theories are apprehensive of the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment that the anthropocentric perspective has seemingly justified; "that man has been granted dominion over nature, that the plants, animals and ecosystems exist for us to *use* [Scruton's italics]".⁷ As Taylor clearly delineates, "[w]e will see the natural environment of our planet turned into a vast artifact"⁸ if humans are to continue to perceive the environment as "nothing more than resources for our own use and consumption."⁹ In a comparable manner, ecocentrists equally emphasise the interconnectedness of nature, with deep ecologists Bill Devall and George Sessions putting it simply: "if we harm the rest of

² P Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, 25th Anniv. ed., Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2011, p. 6

³ JP Sterba, "From Biocentric Individualism to Biocentric Pluralism", *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 17 (2), 1995, pp. 191-207, p. 192.

⁴ SJ Rowe, "Ecocentrism: The Chord that Harmonises Humans and Earth", *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 11 (2), 1994, pp. 106-107, p. 106.

⁵ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 111; in particular Taylor's references towards closely linking biocentrism and the biological sciences.

⁶ BG Norton, "Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism", in A Light & H Rolston III (eds.) *Environmental Ethics*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 2003, p.164.

⁷ R Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About Our Planet*, Atlantic Books, London, 2012, p. 197.

⁸ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 12.

nature, then we are harming ourselves”.¹⁰ Furthermore, as David Worster highlights, the ecocentrist is perhaps seen in greater stead of challenging the noticeably arrogant perspective that anthropocentrism encourages of humans, aiming to counteract “this domination ideology” through an upheaval of the anthropocentric mindset.¹¹ These arguments have increasingly held greater sway within contemporary society, in the push for a more environmentally friendly global culture and greater ecological awareness.

This above similarity of biocentrism and ecocentrism in countering anthropocentric thought is important to accentuate, for it is this point that leads to these theories’ deliberation of extending the possession of intrinsic value beyond humans. This is done through the use of the teleological argument, which I will next proceed to explicate; in particular, I shall underscore how critical this argument is to both environmental ethical theories in substantiating their position on the attribution of intrinsic value, and thus how its subversion will notably knock unsteady the foundation of biocentrism and ecocentrism.

III. The Teleological Argument

Biocentric individualism displays the most obvious use of the teleological argument as its basic foundation; as Taylor writes, this argument is “central to the biocentric outlook”.¹² Hence, it will be sensible to explore this exemplar first of all as to highlight more evidently the occurrence of this argument within biocentric pluralism and ecocentrism. Within an environmental philosophical context, the teleological argument is to be understood in the Aristotelian sense; all biological organisms “seen to be a teleological (goal-orientated) centre of life”¹³ are conceived as “striving to preserve [themselves] and realise [their] good in [their] own unique way.”¹⁴ It is the flourishing of biological, and where appropriate psychological, functions of all living organisms, be they human, nonhuman animal, or plant. This way of viewing organisms as having a form of *telos* does not entail anthropomorphising, as Taylor is intent to demonstrate. This teleological function of all organisms will continue to exist, whether or not human perception of this phenomenon is present.

It is this above argument that forms the first premise for attributing intrinsic value to nonhuman organisms. In understanding that all organisms possess a *telos*, the biocentric individualist asserts that any negative interference committed upon a living organism in the pursuit of their individual good induces a harm – and this is regardless of the capacity to experience physical or psychological pleasure or pain. Kenneth Goodpaster, in outlining this approach, affirms that to recognise all organisms as teleological centers of life is to thus recognise that all organisms have “capacities for benefit and harm”¹⁵ regarding any enhancement or hindrance, respectively, to the realisation of their good. It is this interpretation of harm given that invokes moral consideration to all organisms.¹⁶ On this view, intrinsic value exists individually within all teleologically conceived organisms; each is to be morally considered in virtue of the pursuit of their own individual good, described by Taylor as one having a respect for nature.¹⁷

Biocentric pluralism, however, avers that the logic of the individualist argument extends beyond the limits of the above analysis. Sterba argues that much larger environmental entities, such as species, possess their own good independent of the individual components that it is

¹⁰ B Devall & G Sessions, “Deep Ecology”, in D Schmidtz & E Willott (eds.) *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2002, p. 122.

¹¹ D Worster, “The Intrinsic Value of Nature”, *Environmental Review: ER*, Vol. 4 (1), 1980, pp. 43-49, p. 44.

¹² P Taylor, “In Defense of Biocentrism”, *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 5 (3), 1983, pp. 237-243, p. 237.

¹³ Taylor, 2011, p. 45.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁵ KE Goodpaster, “On being Morally Considerable”, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75 (6), 1978, pp. 308-25, p. 320.

¹⁶ G Varner, “Biocentric Individualism”, in D Schmidtz & E Willott (eds.) *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2002, p. 113.

¹⁷ Taylor *op. cit.*, pp. 44-46.

comprised of; species “evolve, split, bud off new species, become endangered, go extinct, and have interests distinct from the interests of their members.”¹⁸ While the last individual organism of a species can suffer pain at death, this is a separate interest than one that can be attributed to the species’ interest as a whole: that of not becoming extinct. It is therefore clear that in purposefully endangering a species, this harms its *telos* of flourishing and surviving. In this way, the biocentric pluralist puts forward that it is not just individual organisms that can be seen as teleological.

Broadening the scope of intrinsic value even further, the teleological argument is used by ecocentrists in reference to whole ecosystems. While biocentric pluralism believes the individualist argument is cut too short, ecocentrism seeks to rectify what is seen as an inadequacy of the individualist argument in failing to accommodate conservation concerns for ecological wholes.¹⁹ While slightly less referenced than within biocentrism, the teleological argument becomes apparent when we consider the following widely-quoted statement by Aldo Leopold’s development of a land ethic: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”²⁰ The *telos* of an ecosystem relates to reaching a particular equilibrium of stability; to divert this goal is to cause harm upon this entity. Individualism is too reductionist an approach to aid the ecocentric objective of whole ecosystems achieving their good, in maintaining a constant flourishing composition.²¹

IV. Critiquing the Teleological Argument

Now it has been shown how the teleological argument forms the premise for determining why it is biocentrism and ecocentrism argue for the existence of intrinsic value within individual organisms and holistic environmental entities, I shall now seek to demonstrate why this is not a strong line of reasoning. It is my purpose, in the remainder of this paper, to convince the reader that the teleological argument is a weak foundation for both environmental ethical theories within the two points I before described: that (1) interpreting an organism or holistic environmental entity in a teleological manner leads to absurd conclusions, and (2) the use of metaphoric language within biocentrism and ecocentrism, in using the teleological argument, is unsound in its attempt of appeal for intrinsic value to be granted.

Beginning with biocentric individualism, to identify why the logic of the teleological argument forms asinine outcomes one must consider the wider implications of interpreting individual organisms in a teleological manner. For if an organism is attributed intrinsic value due to its teleological nature, this then implies all things that could be seen as possessing a *telos* must also be granted the same consideration. In this way, certain non-biological objects would also have to be granted this value. As Helgie Kuhse writes:

*This understanding [of organisms as being teleological] has the awkward result that we will have to attribute moral standing not only to all living things, but to non-living things as well.*²²

To emphasise the absurdity of this conclusion, imagine a missile has just been launched with its goal to destroy a particular city. If one were to divert this missile from its intended destination, and thus stopping it achieving its goal, this can be seen, similarly to biological organisms, as interfering with its *telos*.²³

The question thus posed is this: is it acceptable to reasonably think that the action of

¹⁸ Sterba, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ JB Callicott, “Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair”, *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 2 (4), 1980, pp. 311-318, p. 313.

²⁰ A Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1949, p. 24-25.

²¹ L Vilkkka, *The Intrinsic Value of Nature*, Rodopi B. V. Editions, Atlanta, GA, 1997, p. 73.

²² H Kuhse, “Interests”, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 11 (3), 1985, pp. 146-149, p. 147.

²³ *ibid.*

disrupting a missile from achieving its goal is morally reprehensible? If we are to take the teleological argument seriously, the simple answer is that there ought to be moral consideration attributed in not interrupting the trajectory of this missile, given it has been granted intrinsic value because of its teleological nature. While not the definitive point I wish to make, this above example provides a suitable starting point in drawing incredulity for understanding the teleological argument as a strong foundation for an environmental ethical theory.

The above missile example does not completely undermine the teleological argument because some important theoretical distinctions have since been made by biocentrists in their defense of this argument. J. L. Arbor writes that using the example of the missile to exhibit the weakness of using the teleological argument as a foundational premise of biocentrism and ecocentrism results from a misinformed interpretation. For to state non-biological objects possess a *telos* is to anthropocentrically perceive them to do so; biological organisms stand separate from these because they “have end-states which are not decided by human beings.”²⁴ After all, if we are to remind ourselves of Taylor’s outline of biocentric individualism, the *telos* of biological organisms exists whether or not it is anthropocentrically perceived. Though this clarification goes some way to aid the teleological argument, in actuality this response only creates further problems.

Arbor’s distinction relies on the condition that there exists a complete dividing line between non-biological objects and biological organisms based upon whether the entity under consideration has an end-state anthropocentrically decided by human perception. While this is clear when we take the missile example into account, there still exist non-biological objects that continue to blur this line. That which I have in mind refers to radioactive decay, a non-biological occurrence possessing a *telos* that would transpire whether or not it is anthropocentrically perceived. Radioactive decay involves a compound that “has an unstable combination of nucleons and emits radiation in the process of regaining stability.”²⁵ Accordingly, the good of the radioactive substance here is in maintaining stability; to disrupt this process, in the same manner as a biological organism, would be to harm the good of the object in interrupting its *telos*. Importantly, however, given the above distinction made by Arbor, radioactive decay occurs whether or not humans are there to readily observe it happening. In which case, radioactive decay, according to the above argument made by the biocentrists, ought to be granted intrinsic value.

It is clear under biocentric individualism that the teleological argument’s intended use is to extend the scope of intrinsic value to all biological organisms to counter anthropocentric thought. However, given the above result that radioactive decay ought to be granted moral consideration, the teleological argument broadens the range of intrinsic value to non-biological objects that would appear absurd to do so. Of course, one could simply accept from this outcome that radioactive decay has intrinsic value; however, this is an argument that the biocentrist must then stringently defend, an argument that would, in my mind, uncomfortably stretch this philosophical account beyond its principled aim. Perhaps the more sensible route would be to greater distinguish why only the *telos* of biological organisms is to be granted intrinsic value and not that of non-biological objects – a distinction that the teleological argument certainly does not make. Consequently, this argument does not provide a firm basis for the biocentric individualist to argue from, given the argument fails to achieve precisely what is desired from the biocentric outlook.

A closer look at the language used within the teleological argument can provide a form of analysis for why this reasoning leads to absurd conclusions; this moves on to my second

²⁴ J.L. Arbor, “Animal Chauvinism, Plant-Regarding Ethics, and the Torture of Trees”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 64 (3), 1986, pp. 335-339, p. 337.

²⁵ “Decay and Half Life”, *Integrated Environmental Management, Inc.*, n.d., viewed on 28 February 2013, <<http://www.iem-inc.com/prhlfr.html>>.

point. In understanding biological organisms as being teleological, they are recognised as being benefited or harmed if it interferes with their good; accordingly, moral consideration is to be granted in this way. However, within the framework of applying the teleological argument to all biological organisms, such usage of the words “benefited” and “harmed” become entirely metaphorical when taken in such a broad context. The utilisation of this vocabulary ought to be therefore treated with frank scepticism, when recognising the emotive consideration expected from the usual connotations of applying these words to describe particular organisms.

To make this point clearer, let us understand this argument in relation to a vegetable, namely a potato. The teleological argument, under biocentric individualism, would state that to interfere negatively with the good of a potato crop is to cause “harm” towards it. Pulling the potato out of the ground before it is fully grown, for example, can plausibly imply that “harm” has been caused to this vegetable’s *telos* of fully maturing; the question then is does this vegetable now demand direct moral consideration? I answer in this way: the biocentrist wrongly attributes moral consideration to this interpretation of “harm”, because they mistakenly empathise with this non-sentient organism in the same way one would to a sentient being. Only metaphorical “harm” is caused to the potato, because the vegetable is not cognisant of its well-being; this interpretation of “harm” is purely anthropomorphised. As such, moral consideration should not be demanded in the same way as we would towards a sentient being. As Kuhse summarises:

*[P]hilosophers are not wrong when they suggest that non-sentient living things can be benefited and harmed, but that they are wrong when they assume that morality has to do with benefits and harms in this broad sense.*²⁶

Similarly, Joel Feinberg has strongly argued that by using the word “flourishing” to describe a plant achieving its goal, “nothing is gained by twisting the botanical metaphor back from humans to plants”.²⁷ The use of metaphoric language here is misleading, devoid of meaningfulness regarding direct moral consideration in the way the biocentric outlook intends.

Given biocentric individualism provides the most explicit use of the teleological argument, the above critique necessarily proceeded with some detail. As will be now shown in relation to biocentric pluralism, the same above points resonate particularly troublingly; however, given these two perspective’s different focus of the attribution of intrinsic value, there exist separate considerations to enquire upon. As previously quoted, Sterba writes that species evolve, split and bud off. While recognising the *telos* of a species in flourishing and surviving may seem straightforwardly identifiable, in fact Sterba’s analysis presents greater complications when attempting to attribute intrinsic value.

If species are to be considered teleological entities, in that they have a good of their own like the individual organisms that comprise them, this assumes clear distinctions between groups of biological organisms in granting intrinsic value. Yet the taxonomy of doing so is incredibly complex; as Charles Darwin recognised, there exist no fixed essences of a species except the individual biological organism. Darwin saw the term species “as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other.”²⁸ This presents a problem for Sterba’s argument; for a consequence of this is that it becomes very difficult to categorise distinct species in granting moral consideration if individuals are

²⁶ Kuhse, *loc. cit.*

²⁷ J Feinberg, “The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations”, in *Philosophy and Environmental Crisis*, W T Blackstone (ed.), University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA, 1974, pp. 54-55.

²⁸ Darwin, C, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, John Murray, London, 1859, p. 53.

constantly changing in form. Any identified species that would have naturally died out as a result of continual mutations or adaptations of individual organisms would seemingly demand the moral consideration to be kept in existence due to their apparent teleological nature. Such a scenario ostensibly envisions an environmental policy based upon maintaining a static state of evolution; for if a genetic change threatens the *telos* of one species towards a different classification, this implies biological restrictions would have to be imposed to prevent this species from dying out in maintaining its flourishing and survival. This outcome, I argue, represents the illogicality of interpreting species as teleological entities. Even if the biocentric pluralist argued that part of a species' innate *telos* is to eventually become extinct, this then presents an outward contradiction with its advocacy of flourishing and survival laid out in this environmental ethic's basic premise. *Prima facie* this is an inconsistency that needs to be dealt with, for no being is infallible in the knowledge of gauging the lifespan of an entire species.

Similarly to biocentric individualism, the language used within the biocentric pluralist approach that utilises the teleological argument does not aid in resolving any quandaries with attributing intrinsic value to whole species. To state that a species can be "benefited" or "harmed" is of the same incorrect perspective in referring to all biological organisms in the broad sense that implies moral consideration. Any beneficiary or suffering experienced by a species is again entirely metaphoric; species do not suffer, for instance, because "suffering is an individual matter, not a property of species."²⁹ Thus, using the teleological argument to account for larger environmental entities still posits pertinent issues that need to be resolved if this argument is to remain the fundamental premise of biocentrism as a whole.

While ecocentrism falls into very similar pitfalls as biocentrism, the consequences for using the teleological argument within this environmental ethic perhaps pose even graver outcomes. For the ecocentric focus on the *telos* of whole ecosystems, regarding their stability and composition, is not only to presuppose ecosystems as being able to reach an equilibrium, but also, due to their perceived teleological nature, there is moral consideration to be granted in maintaining this. Yet, this is an argument flawed from the outset. As Sterba has pointed out, ecosystems do not tend towards stability or harmony; this is "an ecology that is now widely challenged".³⁰ Ecosystems, like species, are constantly changing, and so to try and maintain stability, as seen from a given perspective of the biotic good, would be ultimately too peremptory and paradoxically the opposite of the holistic mindset that ecocentrism demands.

Furthermore, if only to supplement the above point, theoretical attempts to defend ecocentrism in this manner have been largely discredited; James Callicott, as well as Devall and Sessions, have been criticised for advocating a land ethic that would require the greatest moral consideration to be given to the stability of the biotic community. As Tom Regan has argued, such a scenario would allow for the individual to be sacrificed for the greater biotic good, creating a condition of "environmental fascism".³¹ With ecosystems existing in constant flux, there are no means for saying what the biotic good can ever be, and thus Regan's argument represents, as a *reductio ad absurdum*, a strong reason why ecosystems should not be granted intrinsic value due to their perceived teleological nature.

This is without mentioning once more the mistaken use of language used to describe the fluctuations of ecosystems. For if the biotic good can never be established, there exist no concrete means of stating whether an ecosystem is being "benefited" or "harmed" from internal or external inputs. The only meaningful way an ecosystem could be stated to be negatively or positively affected is through understanding the well-being of the individual

²⁹ Dawkins, M S, *Animal Suffering: The Science of Animal Welfare*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1980, p. 28.

³⁰ JP Sterba, "A Biocentrist Strikes Back", *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 20 (4), 1998, pp. 361-76, p. 369.

³¹ T Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1983, p. 362.

organisms that comprise it. As Varner has written, “[a]n ecosystem is valuable only as a means to satisfying individual interests”.³² To state otherwise, in reference to an ecosystem as a whole being, is to again only utilise metaphoric description that is empty of moral deliberation.

V. Conclusion

Having systematically critiqued the use of the teleological argument throughout biocentrism and ecocentrism, I have argued and hoped to have persuaded the reader that the teleological argument, with the above two reasons I have given, is far from the sturdy premise needed to base these two environmental ethical theories upon. As I have limited this discussion to being a polemic, I shall not here recommend alternative theoretical bases to be used instead of the teleological argument; nor do I advocate that anthropocentrism is the only viable ethical option. However, what I have aimed to achieve is stressing that if biocentrism and ecocentrism are to be considered seriously in alternation to anthropocentrism, a far firmer premise than the teleological argument is desired. Otherwise, it is my opinion that both environmental ethical theories are ultimately subverted, unless they are able to reconcile or respond to any of the fraught issues raised within this paper.

³² G Varner, *In Nature's Interests: Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1998, p. 11.

Greening the Dharma: A Critical/Philosophical Analysis of the Potential for Reconciliation in the Buddhism-Environmentalism Debate

Daniil Bachkirov

ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical assessment of the debate between those who support the idea that Buddhism as a set of definable doctrines is uniquely suited to providing an appropriate response to environmental degradation, and their detractors who argue that something is Buddhism if there is evidence in the Buddhist texts to support it. It will offer the argument that both parties' arguments imply a set of goals in the debate that are at odds with one another, and are hindered by illusory dichotomies that make the debate unproductive in terms of reaching a satisfactory conclusion for both parties. It will then assess the potential for reconciliation between the two parties based on a re-evaluation of the debate. This does not rest on establishing that all sides have a common goal but on realising that the adaptive approach of those who advocate collusion is qualitatively different from the scriptural scepticism approach.

I. Introduction

People from various disciplines have been sensing the need to develop an environmental ethic. There is a consensus among them that a lack of moral concern about the well-being of the planet has affected the way we interact with it and has thus been the cause of the environmental degradation that is threatening it. They believe that an environmental ethic is the necessary starting point to thinking seriously about how to, if not reverse, at least take steps to dull the severity of environmental problems. An environmental ethic, one could argue, can be anything from a system of guidelines designed to direct environmental policy-making, to a personally cultivated sense of connection to the natural world. In theory then, the ideal environmental ethic would provide a moral barrier to human beings from engaging in activities harmful to the well-being of the planet.

Since some of the most developed human ethical systems are to be found in religious traditions, there have been efforts to investigate the potential for developing an environmental ethic based in a religious tradition. There are several debates within these efforts; one of which concerns the extent to which an environmental ethical system developed or influenced by a religious tradition can be considered part of that tradition and whether those who developed it have a claim to refer to it as, within the context of this paper, a "Buddhist environmental ethic", or to themselves as Buddhists if they adhere to it.

Most of the debate around the question of whether there can be a Buddhist environmentalism or whether Buddhism is environmentalist or whether Buddhism can aid environmentalism takes the form of justification followed by rebuttal. This paper will critically assess the debate between those who support some kind of collusion between Buddhism and environmentalism and their main detractor, Ian Harris. By assessing both sides' argument, it will offer its own argument that the position and form of both parties' arguments imply a set of goals in the debate; it is these goals that are at odds with one another so as to make the debate an unproductive one in terms of reaching a satisfactory conclusion for both parties. It will then assess the potential for reconciliation based on a rearranging of the debate. The reconciliation rests not on establishing that all sides have a common goal but on realising the different nature of the arguments and goals of the sides as well as on a

clarification of terms. The aim of this paper is not to solve the problem of whether Buddhism and environmentalism can coexist peacefully but to offer an argument for the reconciliation of the two groups that argue for and against integration of the two concepts. It will argue that some of the obstacles in the debate are illusory dichotomies, and will attempt to show that these may be at the root of the arguments “for” or “against” - and therefore that they may obscure the fact that the two groups may be searching for different things entirely.

The approach of the essay is critical, but differs from Harris’s critical approach in that it is a critique and commentary on the entire debate, not just one party’s contribution to it. However, it does not intend to chart the history of the debate; rather it will focus on those parts that best exemplify the dynamic tensions between the two positions and will thus direct criticisms to both positions. In this sense it is a philosophical analysis rather than a historical or anthropological analysis, as its foremost aim is to analyse consistency, presuppositions and aims, as well as offering a potential resolution. It is in this paper’s interests to remain impartial; nevertheless, the nature of rearrangement that will be proposed may prompt some readers to question whether it is leaning to one side in particular.

The second section of this paper deals with what I have termed “the advocates” as a short hand term to refer to those who advocate collusion between Buddhism and environmentalism. It will assess a range of their arguments while arguing that the form of their justification has implications for their goals as advocates. The third section deals with Harris’s rebuttal to the advocates while offering a similar argument with regards to the implications his form of argument presents. The final section offers a case for the reconciliation between the two parties.

II. The Advocates

“If we are to act with a sense of responsibility to the natural world, to our fellow human beings and to future generations, we must find an appropriate environmental ethic. Hence our search for wisdom and new attitudes in that neglected area of knowledge, religion.”³³

In this section, I will look at some of the writers that argue for a Buddhist inspired environmental ethic and discuss some of the implications behind what motivates their drive and where this places advocates in general in the debate. As I am looking at the motivations in general, I will examine the arguments from academics as well as writing aimed at a popular audience; for example, by authors involved in deep ecology. As I am covering Harris’s arguments against a Buddhist environmental ethic in the next chapter, I shall give precedence to the academic argument so as to ensure a level playing field; however, since Harris does cover non-academic proponents’ arguments in favour,³⁴ I will devote the final part of this chapter to those writers.

The purpose of this chapter is, firstly, to show that there is not just one type of advocate that simply says “environmentalism can be found in Buddhism” but that there are those that advocate a Buddhist *inspired* environmental ethic - that there are different forms of suggestions that are lumped into one category by contraries. Secondly, it is to present the advocates’ points in a way that shows that their goals are at odds with that of the contraries; that the goal of the advocates is not simply to provide a counter-argument to the assertion that there is nothing in the Buddhist texts to support an ecobuddhism,³⁵ but to address the complex issue of environmental degradation. Furthermore, it will present the argument that when

³³ L De Silva, “The Hills Wherein my Soul Delights: Exploring the Stories and Teachings”, in M Batchelor & K Brown (eds.) *Buddhism and Ecology*, Cassell Publishers Limited, London, 1992, pp. 18-30.

³⁴ I Harris, “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?”, *Religion*, Vol. 21 (2), 1991, pp. 101-114.

³⁵ Although this is a term of Harris’s used to connote the positing of an incomplete environmental ethic based on one interpretation of Buddhist tenets, it is used here interchangeably as a short hand for “Buddhist environmentalism”.

advocates frame their position as a justifying of a case against contraries, this embroils them in an argument that makes their points sound different to what I will argue are their actual goals and that these do not have to do with having a constant debate with the contraries about whether there is scriptural evidence for an ecobuddhism - although they may believe that it does. Where there is criticism of the advocates' position, it will be based upon criticisms from the perspective of the contraries.

As will be elaborated upon later, most advocates begin the framing of their argument with a section on why a change in the way we relate to the natural world is needed. Donald K. Swearer begins his article with such a section³⁶ in which he laments the general social/economical issues that lead to ills such as the ecological crisis, corporatism and materialism.³⁷ Having established that the cause of moral decline is the abandonment of the guidance of culturally specific ethical systems, such as Buddhism in the case of Thailand, he goes on to explain that the appearance of various forms of fundamentalism has been the response to these social imbalances. However, he prefers "more creative and constructive responses" that "preserve the lasting insights of their faith while at the same time engaging the realities of existence in today's world rather than retreating from them."³⁸ In response, one might question how "preserving lasting insights" differs in method from fundamentalist approaches. There therefore appears to be a case of "good" interpretations vs. "bad" interpretations of ethical systems in different religions.

Furthermore, this implies the existence of a "pure" Buddhism, one that is unchanging and what Harris terms a "monolithic entity".³⁹ This is a bold claim to make if we take into account the myriad of changes in scriptural emphasis and interpretations of those texts that have gone on in the history of Buddhism. Swearer criticises Harris's "selective reading"⁴⁰ of Buddhist texts and traditions, implying that Harris has some overriding agenda but that Swearer does not. Harris, however, levels the same criticism towards the advocates⁴¹ and one might argue that this confirms that there is some kind of misunderstanding going on. Despite his relatively in depth focus on his views of what a legitimately Buddhist approach to an environmentalist ethic should be like in his evaluation of the two approaches, Swearer still skims over what exactly he means by "environmentalism".

So far, from his and other writers' arguments, it is difficult to see environmentalism as more than just a vague soup of sentiments including appreciation of nature (what levels of it?) care for animals (what kind, what constitutes care, according to whom – human beings?) and also the exact level of anthropocentrism required for environmentalism is not commented on. However, since many preludes to the cases put forward begin with a rough outline of "what's wrong with the world and how Buddhism can fix it" with any number of issues such as materialism, corporatism, detachment from the natural world e.t.c, all of which are in their own right are worthy of exploration in terms of how Buddhism can engage with world issues, it seems that a tighter focus on one particular issue or set of issues is less likely to conflate and overreach an interpretation of Buddhism - even if the argument that these issues are all interconnected is a valid one.

³⁶ DK Swearer, "The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhadasa and Dhammapitaka", in ME Tucker & DR Williams (eds.) *Buddhism and Ecology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998, p. 21.

³⁷ Swearer refers to the importance of "classical moral values" (*ibid.*, p. 23) because of the perceived decline of these in Buddhist countries; for example, the extreme cases of environmental degradation and general "lowering of the quality of life" that have occurred:

Our modern economic culture has also had a generally deleterious effect on classical moral values and religious worldviews and on traditions ways of understanding human existence and what constitutes the good or happy life (ibid).

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹ I Harris, "Buddhism and Ecology", in D Keown (ed.) *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, Curzon Press, Surrey, 2000, p. 113.

⁴⁰ Swearer, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴¹ I Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

Sponsel and Sponsel argue for the contribution that the monastic community can make to promote a greener society in Thailand.⁴² On the surface, therefore, their argument concerns a *localized application* of Buddhism although this still arguably bleeds into the justification of an “ecobuddhism for all”. The significance of this approach is that they are not arguing that Buddhism can solve problem *x* by virtue of being Buddhism, but that in a specific environment the dominant ethical structure can be useful in catalysing environmental initiatives.

A similar section has been written by Swearer⁴³ and others, detailing the reasons why action is needed quickly, to which they present a pragmatic case for “ecologically appropriate attributes”;⁴⁴ e.g. what it would take for a given society “to be good at environmentalism”. However, one might argue that it is a list of qualities that may be helpful (e.g. “small and controlled population”, philosophy of “holistic” and “organic” approaches) but not sufficient as characteristics listed appear to mostly be concerned a small portion of the population.

The advocates believe that part of the reason why the monastic community can contribute to a green society is because it is “anti-structural” and appeal to Van Gennep’s⁴⁵ theory of liminality to describe the monastic community getting it’s unique “bird’s eye view”. It does so by being itself liminal, and so, by being detached, sees things in a more balanced way. There are then lengthy descriptions of the monastic lifestyle/environment in Thailand intended to provide undoubtable evidence that it is perfectly suited to serving the needs of a green community. However, one could argue that this is a Western intellectual’s romanticised notion of a communitarian paradise projected onto the “orient” by those who have been disenfranchised with their own society.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as anthropologists, they admit that their research has been mostly limited to an etic account and that an emic one would be of more value.

It is unclear what is behind the apparent interchangeable use of “environmentalism” and “ecology”. A statement like “some of the basic principles of Buddhism parallel those of ecology”,⁴⁷ for example, seems to say that the basic principles of Buddhism parallel those of a scientific field studying the relationships between living organisms and their environments. More attention to this issue will be given in section three.

The advocates list Buddhism as another “resource” to help Thailand with its environmental and moral crisis, along with NGOs, education and science,⁴⁸ which one might argue is characteristic of an etic, post-colonial approach informed by Western scientific/managerial approaches. In listing all of these, they imply that a holistic approach to Thailand’s issues would be effective, which is a valid point. The issue may be, however, if Buddhism is *conflated* with an “holistic approach” or that Buddhism somehow implies the holistic approach. However, for Buddhism to make up a vital part of a grass roots initiative is arguably unproblematic, since in this case “Buddhism”, as a cultural artefact, is not seen as disconnected from its cultural context.

There is a definite difference in Sponsel and Sponsel stating that Buddhism has the potential to contribute to a green society in Thailand and saying that “latent in this philosophy and religion [Buddhism] are parallels to ecology and the basic principles for developing a green environmental philosophy and ethics.”⁴⁹ It appears to be difficult not to slip into saying that there is something definite *in* Buddhism that makes it conducive to developing a green

⁴² LE Sponsel & PN Sponsel, “A Theoretical Analysis of the Potential Contribution of the Monastic Community in Promoting a Green Society in Thailand”, in ME Tucker & DR Williams (eds.) *Buddhism and Ecology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998, p. 45.

⁴³ Swearer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Swearer, *op. cit.*, p.49.

⁴⁵ A Van Gennep, *The Rights of Passage*, Routledge, London, 1909.

⁴⁶ JJ Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought*, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Sponsel & Sponsel, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

ethic when making the case that it can *do good* in developing a green ethic. Furthermore this seems to overreach the extent of the goals of their paper; the goal was to present a case for the potential of the monastic community to contribute to the development of a green ethic in Thailand, not to offer a defence of Buddhist-environmentalism in general.

A point Sponsel and Sponsel keep coming back to is the discrepancy between the ideals of Buddhism and the actions of everyday adherents. This is understandable in the sense of there being a monastic order and a lay community and the differences between them, but it again points to the troubling notion of a “pure” Buddhism that is constant through time. And it seems very much at odds with their closing statement that the relevance of Buddhism to environmental issues “will depend on the adherents of Buddhism interpreting its principles in ways which they find meaningful”.⁵⁰

Fundamentally, the environmentalism being proposed by Sponsel and Sponsel, and by others, is a highly politically loaded one, the general implications being that a change in the way we relate to the world must begin with a change in social structure, a movement towards the “antistructural” monastic community. A relevant point to make would be that an individual monastic community is just that: it is certainly not representative of the Sangha, much less of Buddhism as a whole. Although, with respect, Sponsel and Sponsel have said that they are focusing on the specific case of the Thai monastic community; thus it is a localised theorizing that does not openly attempt to make the case that Buddhism as a whole is at the root of the solution to poor environmental ethics. Nevertheless, in their four reasons for the promotion of Buddhism to work against environmental crises in Thailand, they still make the bold statement that “some of the basic principles of Buddhism parallel those of ecology”.⁵¹

Another pattern in these essays is the citing of monks and use of their work as the central framework for developing an environmental ethic. This is arguably not a bad approach, as long as the authors are asking: what can these individual monks, that happen to be involved in the Buddhist monastic tradition, offer towards the development of an environmentalist ethic? It seems quite a jump to imply that since individuals in religious tradition *x* think about and engage directly in a discourse examining environmental ethics, there must be something in their tradition that has the key to these issues.

One point that advocates bring up - and that Harris critiques⁵² - as a reason for peoples’ continued inattention to environmental degradation, is that the dominant global forces have immersed out of a religious system that does not embrace a view of the natural world that concurs with conservationism. A. Ahern writes that:

*[...] the notion of the self’s transient/impermanent nature and indeed that of all of reality both visible and invisible, is a difficult one to digest in our Western culture which has been so pervasively shaped by the closely related Christian beliefs that the relationship between the individual self and the transcendent creator is of ultimate significance and that the self, via the soul, is immortal.*⁵³

Here, Ahern is not saying that Christianity cannot be conservationist but that the nature of that conservationism will always be determined by the view that Christianity has of the self, therefore hindering its efficacy. She argues that a Buddhist “worldview” conversely is apt for true environmentalism. One can however level the orientalist criticism here again, simply by virtue of the fact that improving something involves denouncing what is within one’s culture and appropriating - however sympathetically - what is in another’s.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵² Harris, “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?”, p. 102.

⁵³ A Ahern, “Preservation by ‘Letting Go’: Buddhist Impermanence (Anicca) in Ruether’s Ecotheology”, *Ecotheology*, Vol. 11 (2), 2006, pp. 212-232, p. 222.

I shall now go on to discuss the contributions of writers aimed at a non-academic audience. It is arguably significant that the importance of a new environmental paradigm is not only something that is expressed in academic debate. The type of writing that is aimed at informed non-academics is free to engage in what I argue is the main goal of the advocates, instead of having to hedge their assumptions and laying out a firm foundation for ecobuddhism for its critics. For this reason, one might argue that in the following types of sources, what advocates are attempting to do is clearer to see.

De Silva arguably exemplifies that which critics, such as Harris, find most troubling about some advocates' positions. She writes "as Buddhism is a fully-fledged philosophy of life reflecting all aspects of experience, it is possible to find enough material in the Pali Canon to delineate the Buddhist attitude towards nature".⁵⁴ There are several issues with this position that show reconciliation between the advocates and contraries based upon common ground is unlikely to occur. Firstly, the view of Buddhism as a "philosophy of life", one might argue, can be traced back to D. T. Suzuki's efforts to popularize Buddhism to a Western audience. One feature of this was postulating that Zen is something that permeates all aspects of life to the extent that it is the purest expression of humankind's religious activity.⁵⁵ This presents a view of Buddhism that is specifically tied to the cultural developments of one nation at one point in time that does not represent Buddhism in other cultural contexts. Secondly, that "enough" scriptural evidence can be found seems to be reminiscent of what Harris refers to as "highly selective Buddhism",⁵⁶ the process by which the advocates comb through texts and select those parts that reflect their ideology, taking the selection out of their context.

Here, De Silva discusses the Agganna Sutta as a depiction of a "golden age" in humanity, in reference to the idea that the world goes through phases of "ups and downs" and that in the present day, due to private ownership and capitalistic structures, we have retreated from that golden age. However, through adherence to Buddhism, which by its nature contains the solutions to overcome these global ills (such as environmental degradation), humankind can return to the world described in the Agganna Sutta.

Writers from diverse fields, from nuclear science to naturalism, have contributed to the advocacy of a Buddhist inspired environmental ethic. A prevalent expression of the problem with current attitudes towards the environment by these writers pertain to deep ecology, which can be defined as the effort to look beyond the pragmatic motivations of environmental conservatism to discuss the earth in terms of its intrinsic value - that "the planet is more than us, more fundamental and basic than our own single species in isolation."⁵⁷ For these writers, the problem with our attitudes towards nature lies in fundamental misunderstandings related to the mind-body problem; because we think that we are separate from our bodies we become separate from the earth as well - that "we live as if the mind were localized exclusively in our head as if it were the source of all awareness and feeling, and as though interconnectedness with all of nature is simply a nice idea that lacks credibility in the eyes of conventional science."⁵⁸

For Abram, Lovelock's work on the Gaia hypothesis⁵⁹ has implications for the abandonment of what he sees as the theory of perception that has been the norm since Descartes and Locke, which has since been built upon by "modern scientific psychology". He argues, "by explicitly showing that self organization is a property of the surrounding

⁵⁴ De Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Harris, *Buddhism and Ecology*, p. 131.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁷ A Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, D Rothenburg (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 12.

⁵⁸ J Hayward, "Ecology and the Experience of Sacredness", in AH Badiner (ed.) *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1990, p. 67.

⁵⁹ J Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

biosphere, Gaia shifts the locus of creativity from the human intellect to the enveloping world itself.”⁶⁰

Macy sees the trend towards ecobuddhism as part of a larger “greening of the self” – the social process of growing awareness of human beings’ interconnectedness with the natural world.⁶¹ One might argue that she is unconcerned with the specifics of why a Buddhist approach to environmental ethics is needed, or, indeed, whether such an approach is viable. Instead it is simply a consequence of the development towards certain worldviews that are occurring outside the strictures of religious systems; however, religious systems can support and focus those developments.

The romanticising of Asian culture and the “golden age” motif that has emerged in some of these writers could be compared to that of 19th century German writers such as Wilhelm Schlegel, who implied that not only does “Asian thought” hold important insights for humankind but that these need to be uncovered by European intellectuals for their full worth to be attained.⁶² Arguably, the above writers implicitly push a dichotomous view that the East has the solutions to the West’s environmental problems because it is far more universalistic, all-embracing, compassionate, and therefore non-anthropocentric, which could be interpreted as the West’s ideal of what environmentalism *should* be like. Thus their writing tells us more about the West’s views on their own environmentalist philosophy than about other cultures’. An extreme critic might even say that the placing of Asian culture/philosophy within a discourse of environmental ethics is a continuation, albeit diverted, of the Enlightenment orientalist and colonialist discourse that sought to “harvest” qualities and materials from “the Other” for the benefit of the West.

A similar example to this is the “golden age romanticising” from drawing upon practices of pre-contact (and present day) Native American tribes who were said to live harmoniously with nature until the white man corrupted this balance. The idea of “the noble savage” has been debunked by critics as colonial apologetics, and thus of little value to anyone.⁶³

There seems to be a qualitative difference in these two sets of writing. Those writing for an academic audience appear more to be making a case *for* trying to justify why Buddhist environmentalism is viable, while those writing for a popular audience, one might argue, are no less sophisticated in terms of the concepts they cover but seem to be more concerned with what all of this is needed *for*. As has been seen, many of the latter writers do not spend too long on how specifically Buddhism fits in to the need for an environmental ethic, but rather are making a commentary on what is occurring and what needs to occur, in a general sense, if the problem of environmental degradation is to be solved. Equally, with regards to the advocates in general, what their goal is with regards to an environmental ethic is not a system of how to approach environmental conundrums pragmatically but a shift in the way the individual thinks about the environment. While this approach, the advocates hope, will have quantitative effects on the environment, it is primarily a qualitative process.

There is clearly room for criticism of the advocates’ position based upon their foundation for a Buddhist inspired environmental ethic. However, as I shall go on to explain, this is arguably not their end goal.

⁶⁰ D Abram, “Perceptual Implications of Gaia”, in AH Badiner (ed.) *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1990, p. 79.

⁶¹ J Macy, “The Greening of the Self”, in AH Badiner (ed.) *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology*, Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA, 1990, p. 53.

⁶² Quoted in KP Murti, *India: The Seductive and Seduced "Other" of German Orientalism*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 2001, p. 17.

⁶³ S Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, NY, 1999, p. 16-17.

III. The Contraries: Ian Harris's Account of Incompatibility

"[...] nothing remotely resembling a *Tractatus Ecologico-Philosophicus* exists in any of the three great epochs, namely the canonical, classical and modern of Buddhist history."⁶⁴

The primary issue that Harris seeks to address in his contribution to the Buddhism-environmentalism debate is whether Buddhism has the constituent parts necessary to be the foundation for an environmental ethic.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in his view, it is arguably the scriptural constituent parts that are of most importance and that an examination of them should be the starting point for a critical analysis of any potential kind of Buddhist-inspired environmental ethic. The structure of most of Harris's writing appears to take the form of the examination of what he sees to be justifications of ecobuddhism, followed by the approval or disapproval of the views of Buddhism that these justifications imply.⁶⁶

The purpose of this chapter is, through examining the implications of Harris's position, to show that he has a set of goals that drive him in a direction that is different from that of the advocates. The nature of his rebuttals only allow responses to those rebuttals that work towards his goal, namely to provide a firm foundation, and thus a justification, for the development of Buddhist environmental ethic. Where there is criticism of his criticisms towards the advocates, these will be to show that they cause a rift between the two groups.

One Harris's major frustrations appear to be the "slapping on" of the label "Buddhist" to things that exist outside of, or at least have no direct foundation, in the scriptural tradition. Examining this sentiment further, it would suggest that what the advocates are doing, according to Harris, is using an *incorrect* label for their theories, and are wrong to say that their theories *directly* stem from Buddhist thought. They would, in this case, do better in calling their ideas something else, and saying that they were influenced by their own and other writer's *interpretations* of Buddhism. So far so good, but this then implies that there is a *correct* way of interpreting Buddhism, and, if not correct, then a permitted or favoured way (i.e. the textual/scriptural way).

If we take seriously Harris's assertion that "there is a difficulty in deciding whether to privilege textual or anthropological evidence" and that because of this "it will be impossible to construct a definitive Buddhist position on ecological matters", this then implies that Harris has taken his pick in the toss up - the scriptural approach is the way to go. However, that what is at issue here is the *construction* of a Buddhist position on xyz, an interpretation that is based on personal and academic biases. One might also argue that, in the place of "anthropological evidence", one can pit any other approach against the scriptural.

One can easily state that there exist no flaws in the construction of Harris's argument, insofar as he has provided the "rules of the game". These would be (disconnected from a random practicing Buddhist's opinion) that there has to be textual evidence for a claim to what can be "Buddhism". Those wishing to participate in the game would have to simplify their goal to match the aim of this game, which is to assess a proposition's scriptural authority.

The problem is that it is not always clear exactly to which and what kind of group of advocates Harris is directing his criticisms towards. As was shown in the previous section, the advocates are not all commenting on the same thing; some are discussing the potential from a localized setting,⁶⁷ some are commenting on this trend from the outside, as a developmental

⁶⁴ Harris, *Buddhism and Ecology*, p. 113.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ It would be safe to assume that Harris aligns himself within the scriptural/textual approach to address this particular debate, which has implications for the form and outcome of his argument.

⁶⁷ Sponsel & Sponsel, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

process of humankind generally,⁶⁸ and some are not even offering a system for approaching environmental issues pragmatically.⁶⁹

Another important frustration for Harris is when it is implied that Buddhism has approximate concepts to “environment”, “ecology” and “nature”, and the implication that there is a monolithic “Buddhism” - for Harris argues there is a plurality of “Buddhisms”, some of which may be more conducive to harbouring lifestyles that can be labelled “environmentalist”.⁷⁰ In this assertion, Harris seems to take issue with those advocating a Buddhist environmentalist ethic for being insensitive to the fact that there are myriad variations in culture and practice, and that this is unhelpful to several groups.⁷¹ He might argue that with the first group, the advocates themselves, essentialising Buddhism gives them an unstable foundation upon which to build their ideas. The second group, practising Buddhists, may find themselves disillusioned with an interpretation that may skip over or dismiss elements of Buddhism that they feel are important in their particular environment. And finally, to essentialise Buddhism for curious non-Buddhist Westerners would be irresponsible, and could lead to dangerously skewed orientalist and over-romanticised images of Buddhism that are unhelpful.

Despite this, however, he asserts a monolithic approach to approving the internal developments of Buddhism, and denies that the recent trend towards an ecologically aware and active Buddhism can be one of these Buddhisms. This would surely not conflict with his ideal of plurality. However, fundamentally it seems that it is the scriptural/historical approach that has the last say in the question of what counts as Buddhism and what does not.

Ironically - though this may be a deviation - while Harris levels the criticism to advocates that engage in “golden age” romanticizing using the mythical past in Buddhist texts as a guide for what can be achieved in this time period⁷² (such as De Silva’s references to the *Agganna Sutta*⁷³), his emphasis on the primacy of scripture could be interpreted as a romanticising of the role that scripture plays in a religious tradition, and that looking to scripture is the way forward in maintaining religious consistency. His position seems to imply that different approaches – historical or anthropological - to the question may go in different directions. Because of this difficulty he then resigns himself to the general question of whether there is evidence to show that Buddhism, as a religious tradition, is an “ecologically aware” tradition.

Harris’s arguments based around what is *not* the case are not necessarily offering anything in the place of what the advocates offer. While his aims are clear - to deconstruct the assertion that an environmental ethic can be developed out of Buddhism - one might argue that there is room for an effort to reconcile scriptural Buddhism with the efforts of the advocates; yet, this has not been attempted. Harris appears to deny Buddhism as an entity in flux, without the autonomy to grow in directions that could not have been foreseen by its pre-modern adherents. Even then, these adherents arguably saw Buddhism as a “working religion.”⁷⁴

It seems that a distinction is made between the natural eclectic developments of early Buddhism (such as regional cultural influences, adaptation to environment, breaking away

⁶⁸ Macy, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ DE Cooper & SP James, *Buddhism, Virtue and the Environment*, Ashgate Publishing Company, Vermont, VT, 2005, p. 144.

⁷⁰ Harris, *loc. cit.*

⁷¹ To practicing Buddhists and to curious non-Buddhist Westerners that they may be trying to appeal to, putting across the idea that Buddhism is fundamentally this or that is a poor move (one might argue that it is odd that Harris’s earlier paper is entitled “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?” when in a later publication, he makes the case that there would be no use in asking such a question since there are no corresponding concepts in the Buddhist texts.

⁷² Harris, “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?”, p. 102.

⁷³ De Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁷⁴ Furthermore, one might argue that the way in which Harris paints contemporary developments (such as the turn towards a Buddhism that is engaged with ecological issues) in Buddhism as a world religion are implicitly disparaging. For example, when summing up the cultural and intellectual ingredients that lead to thinking about an engaged Buddhist environmentalism, he lists the “uneasy partnership” of “Spinozism, New Age religiosity and highly selective Buddhism”.

from the dominant brahmanical social structures, and vegetarianism) and those of the modern era. In the modern era, Buddhist countries have undergone tremendous social and political upheaval, such as Japan's opening up to the West and the change brought by the two world wars. Leading on from that has been the interaction and integration with Western culture. It appears that, in particular, it is the advocates that express the most dissatisfaction with the influence that the West has had on Buddhist countries,⁷⁵ while neglecting to clearly acknowledge the role that Western worldviews have played in influencing ideas such as ecobuddhism.

Harris outlines a tendency of some advocates, such as Lynn White Jr., to be heavily influenced by anti-Christian sentiment in the formulation of their case for ecobuddhism.⁷⁶ They appear to "offer" Buddhism as a textbook of alternative approaches to a problem that the dominant Western culture, informed by a Christian background, has created. Therefore, it is when the advocates base their support for a Buddhist environmental ethic on reactionary, personal, romantically loaded presuppositions and one-sided views that Harris identifies as a problem.

There then appears to be room for an argument that affirms the current development and branching out of different "Buddhisms" as comparable to the changes that early Buddhism experienced. The only difference, as Harris might state, with modern era developments is that they occur outside of a scriptural framework. Harris himself makes the case that early Buddhism was an amalgam of different "Buddhisms"⁷⁷ that ranged from the scriptural tradition of the intellectual elite, to those practiced by "rural peasantry and forest-dwelling monks". Equally, there is room for the argument that avoids a plurality of static "Buddhisms", instead offering the vision of a versatile and adaptive whole that draws on scriptural elements, but does not see them as the foundation to the tradition.

A potential criticism from advocates of a Buddhist environmental ethic might be that Harris asserts a kind of privileged understanding that gives him the right to speak on behalf of Buddhist historical tradition. Given the nature of his contributions to the discourse on ecobuddhism, one might wonder what he *does* approve of regarding contemporary developments in Buddhism. It would be interesting to investigate Harris's views on the "state" of contemporary Buddhism, as one might argue he seems to hint that the critique of ecobuddhism cannot be seen as disconnected from a larger critique of global developments in Buddhism.⁷⁸ Such a critique might shed light on the division between "popular" and "scriptural" Buddhism.

The general form of Harris's contribution seems to be conducive to an analysis of what he is making a case *against* and it is through this that his position can be interpreted. The aspect of ecobuddhism that bothers him most, and which is arguably at the crux of the philosophy itself, is when advocates of a Buddhist environmental ethic presuppose a firm connection between the tenets of Buddhism and the principles of environmentalism.

It is a significant stumbling block, and a point that I will expand on in the next chapter, that Harris, as well as the advocates he criticises, has not clearly defined what he means by environmentalism. He has not stated what type of environmentalism he is describing in opposition to his scriptural view of Buddhism. It seems to follow that if he clearly lays out his case as to why a given Buddhist related phenomenon lacks sufficient "credentials" then it is equally important to clearly define *what it is* that is not in Buddhism, which in this case is "environmentalism". In laying out the textual evidence that an advocate could use to support the case for ecobuddhism, such as the altruistic acts of anthropomorphic animal figures in the

⁷⁵ Sponsel & Sponsel, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁷⁶ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁷⁷ Harris, *Buddhism and Ecology*, p. 114.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

*Jataka*⁷⁹ and others, one would have to assume that Harris asserts the environmentalism or ecological awareness exhibited by these texts is always of the same kind, with the same motivations and aims.

One source of Harris's scepticism could be what he sees in the ecobuddhist drive as a species of religious fundamentalism. This model, he might argue, is similar to when a group motivated by an interpretation of a religious tradition sees their interpretation as the truest one, or the one that upholds the "lasting insights"⁸⁰ of the belief system as a whole. However, his interpretation of this could be seen as symptomatic of the process by which, in response to a rebuttal from Harris, the advocates want to appeal to his sensibilities because they want to convince him and so allude to "lasting insights" as evidence of a strong foundation for a Buddhist environmental ethic. This then puts Harris on guard, as, since his sensibilities lie in the scriptural tradition, something that alludes to lasting insights but does not have enough scriptural evidence to back this up feels like fundamentalism.

One could interpret Harris's position as a kind of scholarly conservatism, saying: "challenge the convention/tradition, i.e. texts, at your peril; they have come about through an organic process and have survived for a reason". If he is saying this however, it would be possible to throw the same accusation back onto him and say that he is also guilty of a "golden age" sentiment, that "there was a time when..." the practice of Buddhism emanated linearly from its sacred texts. This assertion he would probably deny however, since he makes the case that there was a division between "folk" Buddhism and that which was practiced by the urban elite.⁸¹ Yet this point was part of his case that there were a plurality of Buddhisms in the past, which the advocates make no reference to.

A theme in Harris's writing that is significant to this paper's argument is the plurality of "Buddhisms" and who approves them. The issue is that even if we agree that there *is* a plurality, in order to have this theory approved, an advocate must play by the rules of Harris's scriptural approach that then undermines their plurality.

IV. Reconciliation

In the previous two sections, the advocates and the contraries were shown to have conflicting goals that complicated the debate. Both groups were limited to their own set of preoccupations. This was especially evident in the previous section, where Harris provides "the rules of the game" which, when in a debate with him, advocates are forced to argue on his terms, which I argue detracts them from their goal. The criticism that appears in this section is refers to the nature of the discourse in the Buddhism-environmentalism debate that this paper has focused on, offering an argument as to why it might be unproductive and why misunderstandings may have and may continue to occur.

One might argue that Harris's concerns are quite modest, in that he only wants to ensure that new approaches to the Buddhist tradition stay consistent and do not pass something off as "Buddhism" when it is not. The advocates' concerns, however, might be more complex, whereby their primary motivation is finding a solution to what might be termed a sociological or anthropological problem - specifically the attitudes that lead to environmental degradation. Providing a justification for this in academic debate, such as scriptural evidence, is only one expression of their concern and arguably not the highest one on the list. And, as has been argued in the second section, there is a wide variety of writing where Buddhism ranges from being directly proposed to be environmentalist to merely being mentioned as an outlet for creative thinking regarding solving environmental problems.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 121.

⁸⁰ Swearer, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁸¹ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

Therefore, the motivations of these writers are more complex; simply debating scriptural authority based on very specific views on what Buddhist can and cannot be, limits the full potential of the debate. It may be important to qualify the previous statement by saying that “full potential” does not refer to my personal opinions on what the outcome of the debate should be, but is based on a critical assessment of the leanings of the debaters and of the question: in what way can an individual group be satisfied or be said to have come to a complete conclusion? For example, if Swearer believes that “the compatibility between the Buddhist worldview of interdependence and “an environmentally friendly” way of living in the world [...] are important contributions to the dialogue on ways to live in an increasingly threatened world”,⁸² regardless of whether he is correct in conflating Buddhism with an “environmentally friendly” way of living in the world, what does this show that he wants as an end? I argue that the primary concern of the advocates is important to consider when judging the validity of their claims through Harris’s critical framework.

The question “How can Buddhism contribute to the solution to a poor environmental ethic?” is qualitatively different to the question “Is Buddhism environmentalist?”. One might argue that this distinction is not clearly demarcated in the writings of these academics and laypersons alike, as one might say they are arguing about different things, yet under the impression that it is the same thing.

The reconciliation that is being proposed is not based upon the two sides finding common ground on the issue of whether there can be a Buddhist environmentalism, but on, firstly, recognising that both sides have different agendas, and secondly that these agendas require a specific forum geared to them to allow them to develop. In a sense, one could argue that both sides have already made up their minds before debating; the advocates may not believe that a firm scriptural foundation is necessary given the urgency of their concern and the contraries may feel that labelling a seemingly unrelated political ideology “Buddhist” without a scriptural base fundamentally compromises Buddhism’s integrity. Overall, one might argue that the drive to develop an environmental ethic is different from the drive to critique a set of reasoning.

Clearly then, both parties need to be in agreement as to what each side wants and what is at stake. But before discussing some of the issues standing in the way of this, it may be important to clearly ask why reconciliation is necessary, why it is good and who it benefits. One argument for its necessity is, as has been mentioned, that the current state of the most heated area of the debate seems to be that it is locked in exchanging interpretations of Buddhist scripture; one side saying that it implies an ecobuddhism and the other side saying it does not. For example De Silva is convinced that in the Cakkavattisihanada Sutta’s commentary on human moral decline and its links to decline of crops over time, there is evidence of a proto-environmentalist concern for maintaining regular cycles of harvesting and a warning against overproduction.⁸³ Whereas at the same time Harris highlights a section from the same Sutta that he interprets as a message that the natural world will eventually be “civilized” and that the physical degradation of human beings will be altered to the extent that we live to 80,000 years of age.⁸⁴ Aside from the argument that the texts are in fact ambiguous with regards to environmentalism, there is clearly some imbalance between the goals of the two sides and a reconciliation based on finding common ground in texts is unlikely.

A reconciliation based on a restructuring of the debate would arguably benefit both sides simply in terms of mutual understanding, since at this stage the advocates think that contraries need convincing of the legitimacy of their approach and contraries think that the advocates need/want to make provisions for a stable foundation to their claim. Now, one

⁸² Swearer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁸³ De Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Harris, “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?”, p. 108.

could make the case that the advocates are not even making a claim, and where they are it is because they are forced to play by the scripturalist's rules. As has been shown in section two, the advocates' position (if it is right to call it that) comes from diverse motivations, which makes it a more complex one that cannot be met simply by a scriptural approach; this arguably forces them to reduce the complexity of their argument.

Several issues might be seen to stand in the way of the proposed "reconciliation". Firstly, throughout the material collected discussions concerning whether environmentalism is *suited* to Buddhism or whether Buddhists can adequately *participate* in environmentalist initiatives have not been qualified by an explanation of what is meant by "Buddhism" or "environmentalism". With regards to a definition of "Buddhism", such a task is beyond the scope of this paper, and in all likelihood most others given even the multitude in variations of interpretations of it presented here. The issue though is that most authors on both sides have leapt into a discussion of whether Buddhism can or cannot be "this" without perhaps giving a short disclaimer such as this one surrounding such claims of definition.

Secondly, with regards to "environmentalism", its lack of definition has the potential to cause greater misunderstanding, a shortcoming that is pushed aside while the argument deals with what Buddhism can and cannot be. For example, the vague meaning of "green", which when not qualified by an explanation may imply a multitude of different concepts. It can in most cases mean anything the writer wants it to mean, ranging from a label for a system that works towards the human understanding of harmony between natural entities, to a holistic approach of viewing human beings as dependent and sustained by the natural world. The advocates that I have come across have not qualified *their* Buddhism with the term "green", which insured against drawing simplistic conclusions of monasteries that recycle and make their own compost. As Cooper and James write, "environmental ethics is a multi faceted thing" and that "one form of "adequate" environmental ethic might show how various forms of environmental concern are parts of human flourishing."⁸⁵

To take an unconnected example, being "environmentally conscious" manifests itself in a variety of different ways, as Dan Washburn describes in his "Shanghai Diaries". He reports that in parts of China, artificially constructed "green space" is considered one way of being environmental conscious, but:

*[...] when Westerners think of green space, we think of a park — a real park — often with grass that you can sit and tramp on. In China, it's any area that is specifically designated as green space. There are certain things that qualify. Lawns and bushes count. A row of trees or even one tree with a kind of affected area next to it counts as green space. Turf block that you can park on counts as green space. In some cases, even hard landscape that has no green space whatsoever counts as green space.*⁸⁶

This indicates that environmentalism can be an *interculturally* fluid concept as well as there being *intracultural* disagreements as far as how best to implement these concepts.

While avoiding a definition, Harris's views and opinions of environmentalism might be informing the way he compares it to Buddhism. For example, it is a worry for him when Buddhism is painted with the ability to balance "the competing demands of science and the environment."⁸⁷ He seems to also hint that he takes issue with the prevalent expressions of distress concerning the condition of the environment, perhaps feeling that these serve to relate back to the Judeo-Christian issue.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Cooper & James, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁸⁶ D Washburn, "Green Acres: Some People Really Think Shanghai is a "Garden City"", *Shanghai Diaries*, 30 May 2003, viewed on 10 March 2012, <http://www.shanghaidiaries.com/archives/2003/05/30/green_acres/>.

⁸⁷ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸⁸ Harris, *Buddhism and Ecology*, p. 117.

Furthering the issue of orientalism raised in section two, one might also interpret Harris's assertion that the Buddhist cosmology conception does not include a concept of nature to be, firstly, a very bold statement, and secondly one that, in asserting an incompleteness, is implicitly disparaging; even if this is not intentional, such an analysis would still be based on translation which may have been informed by certain biases.

Both sides have raised the Buddhist notion of impermanence and its relation to ideas of ecobuddhism, with the advocates generally being open to a variety of interpretations regarding a proposed connection to environmentalism. On the contraries side, however, the doctrine of impermanence points towards a fundamental incompatibility between Buddhism and the principle of preservation and positive engineering in environmentalism. A definition of, or at least an acknowledgement of the fluidity of the terms "Buddhism" and "environmentalism" therefore seems significant to beginning a debate about how either of them can be applied, or if they can be applied at all. If there is not, the task of establishing the goals of both parties becomes a challenging process.

Another issue that arguably stands in the way of "reconciliation" is that much of the discourse that has been looked at contains a number of problematic dichotomies that get in the way of the goals of both parties, causing them to argue for or against a set of issues painted to be binary opposites. These pose a problem for both parties. If "environmentalism" has not been defined, the dichotomy of environmentalist/non-environmentalist conveys little. Equally, "environmentally friendly",⁸⁹ even if presented in quotation marks, may convey a set of presumptions which if undefined could lead to inconsistency.

An additional problematic set of dichotomies that come into play more frequently in the advocates' position is what one might term "orientalist dichotomies". These appear when, for example, Sponsel and Sponsel argue that "Buddhism has a long history of mutualistic relationships with the forest"⁹⁰ as reason why Buddhism is suited to an environmental ethic. One might argue that such a statement inadvertently implies that the West, or religion from the West, has a non-mutualistic, or selfish, world outlook. Even if the word "environmentalism" was meant to convey information about another culture, it has simultaneously created a distinction when the authors are writing from a Western perspective. With that, the rest of the text is open to criticism of the authors' potential romanticising of "the East" and tells the reader more about the author than about the topic they are writing about.

Equally, the prevalent binary distinction of pragmatic/non-pragmatic is one that both parties could be said to have employed, if Harris were, for example, to align the scriptural approach with pragmatism and Abrams with spiritual non-pragmatism. Evidently, such distinctions complicate the debate and obscure the goals of both parties. Both parties might prefer to refer to themselves as the pragmatic approach, insofar as they are being pragmatic in the attempt to address their own goals.

On a related note, one might argue there has been a dichotomy established between "advocate" and "contrary" in this paper. This has been done for two reasons: firstly, mindful of the above issues, it made for a convenient short hand; secondly, it represents the problematic nature of the debate itself.

One last issue that would have to be dealt with concerns religious conviction as an area that the scriptural perspective may be challenged by. One might argue that even if Harris is admittedly mostly concerned with scriptural authority, if someone were to level an argument that is primarily religious and/or based in self reflection, as Abram⁹¹ does, Harris would have to change the "rules of the game". For Abram expresses a sentiment related to deep ecology,

⁸⁹ Swearer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁹⁰ Sponsel & Sponsel, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁹¹ Abram, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

that our *experience* of nature is closely bound up with our *conception* of the self and that from his studies of Buddhism, he has simply found a similar conception of mind.

Now, even if Harris could level the criticism that Abram's interpretation of Buddhism is shaped by his expectations of what being environmentalist or "ecocentric" should be, there is a strong element of subjective and arguably religious conviction/faith that Harris would be limited to engage with, given his emphasis on the pragmatics of matching practice with scripture.

Overall, it seems that "reconciliation" is an inadequate term to use, since we have established that what is being proposed is not a meeting of the ways. Equally, what is not being proposed is "agreeing to disagree", but rather going back to the beginning and asking both groups what their goals are. While Harris might argue that Buddhism and environmentalism are inherently incompatible based on a scriptural foundation, I would qualify this by saying that this belief is at the root of why the two parties' *goals* are incompatible. It might be better, therefore, to suspend the meaning of the word *reconciliation* and instead think of the connotations of it, namely a sigh of relief that an argument has come to an end.

V. Conclusion

While the goals of both parties have been established to be at odds with one another, and that the current nature of the debate seems to characterize the fact that both parties need to reassess the benefits that the continued debate would bring, there is now a lot of room for furthering the debate in a direction that would be productive to both.

The goal of this paper was not to provide a conclusion to the question of whether there is sufficient reason to accept a Buddhist environmental ethic; neither was it to argue for one side or the other. Rather, it was intended to be a detached commentary on the debate as a whole, intended to highlight not just the main arguments of each party but to offer a theory as to why they have argued the way that they have and in what direction this was going. Arguably, I have established that the potential for the debate in the form that I have described it, is locked in a stale interchange of scriptural interpretations and that a rearrangement of the parties' priorities is in order for it to have the potential to progress towards their respective goals. Therefore, in terms of "where to from here?" there may be a number of starting points.

One direction that this debate could go would be to draw on more scientific writing. Although working with scientists themselves could be difficult due to the nature of the research, one might argue that scientific writing as a grounding foundation for any discussion involving "environmentalism" is beneficial in terms of maintaining consistency and avoiding dichotomies such as green/non-green. Whereas Harris might agree and say that the same should be true of Buddhism, i.e. that any discussion concerning Buddhism needs to have scripture as a foundation for it, one could make the argument that there is a constant monitoring of the scientific process with rigorous standards and precision. This is unlike the textual study of religious traditions, as a lot still rests on interpretation and working with archaic or imprecise translations.

Equally, there may be room for a historical study of the debate as whole. This is not what I have attempted. While a historical study would chart the debate and the changes in it over time and take into account cultural and intellectual contexts, I have chosen to focus on a relatively small section of the debate from a philosophical perspective. In general, one might argue that a historical approach to the debate combined with a holistic approach to investigating the potential for the contribution of Buddhism to environmentalism in terms of looking at all the aspects that would be needed for such an environmental ethic to be viable

(not just the scriptural component) would prove beneficial to both parties and may eventually call for an interdisciplinary approach to the debate.

I Know There's an Answer: The Aesthetics of *Pet Sounds*

David Holt

ABSTRACT

This work is a discussion of aesthetic philosophy, aimed at establishing the 1966 Beach Boys album 'Pet Sounds' as a great work of art. To begin, I will examine the theories of Theodore W. Adorno, Robin G. Collingwood, Eduard Hanslick, and Bruce Baugh to establish an aesthetic value in music. Subsequently, I will apply these theories to Pet Sounds to examine what is aesthetically pleasing about the album, concluding that Pet Sounds is indeed a work of art from different perspectives within aesthetic philosophy.

I. Introduction

*"Pet Sounds is much more than a record; it is an emotional experience to be felt, understood, savoured, and enjoyed. Long after we're gone, its irrepressible spirit will survive, and its messages of love, hope, and fear will nestle their way into the hearts and souls of a new generation."*⁹²

*"To me, it certainly is a total, classic record that is unbeatable in many ways [...] I've often played Pet Sounds and cried. It's that kind of an album for me."*⁹³

I discovered *Pet Sounds* in the winter of 2007 at the age of 15. I had spent the previous summer and autumn months listening to a vast collection of their most popular songs on a compilation *The Platinum Collection*, an album that I had borrowed from a local reverend. Upon initially listening to *The Beach Boys*, I chose to pay close attention to their earlier music. Thematically, their earliest work focused on fun in the sun, girls, and adolescence. At a particularly delicate time in my life, I decided to discover for myself whether *Pet Sounds* was truly worthy of the overwhelming praise it has received over the last 40 years. I would be lying if I said that I loved it from first listen, it was so far removed from anything I had heard before. I was expecting a collection of upbeat pop songs that would soundtrack my summers for years to come, but its complex song structures and unusual chord progressions caught me completely by surprise. It wasn't until I listened to the album alone that *Pet Sounds*, with all sincerity, took me to a place I had never been before and changed me profoundly. Regardless of all critical acclaim that the album has garnered since its release in 1966 and no matter how many music publications name it "one of the greatest albums of all time", what ultimately matters is that 6 years since I first heard the album, it has resonated strongly throughout my adolescent life and into adulthood.

What I didn't know at the time of listening is what little input *The Beach Boys* had in the conception and composition of *Pet Sounds*. After a string of hit singles and albums throughout the early 1960s, *The Beach Boys* reached a commercial peak in 1964. The demand for them to write, record, and release new material, alongside personal issues and copious use of LSD, took a massive toll upon lead songwriter Brian Wilson. In December 1964, *The Beach Boys* were en route to a concert in Houston, Texas. Shortly after take-off Wilson suffered a mental breakdown; he began sobbing and crying, and, after refusing to continue touring with the group, he returned to Los Angeles. Wilson spent the following months sheltered in his Los Angeles home, determined to write "the greatest rock album ever made."⁹⁴ Wilson wanted to move away from the mainstream pop style of the time and

⁹² CL Granata, *I Just Wasn't Made for These Times: Brian Wilson and the Making of Pet Sounds*, Unanimous Ltd, London, 2003, p. 18.

⁹³ P McCartney, *Paul McCartney on Pet Sounds*, D Leaf (interviewer), Tokyo, 1990.

⁹⁴ Granata, *loc. cit.*

towards mature and sophisticated music. Rather than following in the footsteps of artists of the time such as Bob Dylan, who were creating “message” songs with political statements, Wilson turned inwards to address his intense personal emotions and express them through his music.

Despite my own personal adoration for *Pet Sounds*, I digress as this essay seeks not to provide any sort of personal critique of *Pet Sounds* nor a biographical account of Wilson. My aim is to provide an account of the aesthetic dimension of Wilson’s seminal album, which in turn throws up a number of questions: can popular music ever be considered great art? That is, when examining accounts of aesthetic judgement on what a work of great art is, is it possible to argue that any ‘popular’ music is truly worthy of being called a work of art? In the second section of this essay I want to examine different perspectives on what philosophers believe to be aesthetically rich music. I shall examine two different accounts of the aesthetics of music that would derive popular music of having no aesthetic worth, that of Theodore W. Adorno and Robin G. Collingwood. Subsequently, I will also be assessing the ‘form’ and ‘matter’ distinction in aesthetics with reference to Eduard Hanslick and Bruce Baugh, looking to answer the questions: where exactly do we find aesthetic worth in music? In its composition or in the way it makes us feel?

The third section of this essay is concerned with *Pet Sounds* directly; once I have established a framework composed from traditional accounts of aesthetics, I will to examine exactly how these accounts of aesthetics would examine *Pet Sounds*. I will look at themes present within the songs, the composition of the music with regard to both the context of its initial release and the place it serves retrospectively in mass art today, and examine the visceral properties of *Pet Sounds*.

Although I am aware that musical taste is completely subjective, and you may personally have countless examples of your own personal choice when addressing key aesthetic concepts that I shall outline in this essay, I ask that before you proceed you are familiar with *Pet Sounds*. As I have established, although the arguments I will be examining take place independently of any specific artworks, this essay seeks to directly establish that *Pet Sounds* can be called great art. I would implore that you have listened to the album several times before you consider my arguments. I do not ask this so that you can appreciate the album in the same way that I do, but so that you have a sufficient basis to engage with some of the arguments I will present in this essay. This is not for any other purpose than to secure a good footing for engaging with my arguments.

II. The Aesthetics of Music

Before I can assess whether *Pet Sounds* can be considered as a great art, we must first examine discussions in the field of aesthetics concerned with that of music. The purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the leading philosophical arguments into what aesthetic value music can hold. There has been a great wealth of discussion to attempt to establish an aesthetics of music since the 18th century; these discourses have attempted to ascertain what exactly *is* beautiful in music. The majority of early 20th century philosophical discussion on the aesthetic value of popular music seems to serve only to discredit it as having no aesthetic worth whatsoever, usually attempting to show that popular music is not genuine art but rather is illusory. However, in more recent years a handful of philosophical figures have attempted to refute claims against the lack of aesthetic worth in popular music, instead celebrating its value and trying to establish it as worthwhile and aesthetically rich. I have chosen four different accounts to attempt to draw attention to some of the key philosophical stances on the aesthetics of music, and while this overview is in no way exhaustive it provides us with an insight into some of the theories present as to what music can be considered aesthetically rich.

While there is a lot of worthwhile and lengthy discussion into these discourses, this essay seeks not to establish any sort of critique of them. My focus here is to outline opposing arguments within the field of aesthetics, and from there examine *Pet Sounds* alongside these discussions to see how aesthetic philosophers would regard it.

I shall begin with discussions on the culture industry by Theodor W. Adorno. It is important to note that Adorno's discussions aren't just concerned with philosophy but also with sociology, inspired by the writings of Karl Marx. The discourses I shall be addressing, however, concern the nature of art and although Adorno uses this to identify the culture industry as a social problem, it is inherently a philosophical argument. In referring to 'popular music' Adorno doesn't necessarily mean music that is genuinely popular, but rather music that has been commoditised - made for the purpose of sale rather than for the sake of art. Adorno believed that genuine art should attempt to free itself from the social condition that it finds itself in. Art, for Adorno, should be autonomous in a world that has been dominated by capitalism. Genuine art should be able to serve, echoing the sentiments of Immanuel Kant's 18th century aesthetics, a purposive purposelessness, that which is beautiful within itself and serving no ulterior purpose than that of beauty.⁹⁵

Adorno's key criticism of popular music, or rather the popular music industry, is that it does not attempt to resist the relevant forms of social domination that he believed were present in 20th century industrialised society. As large-scale organisations began to rise, individuals became less free than they once were and became dominated by these institutions. Popular music therefore cannot be considered autonomous or aesthetically valuable because it serves the purpose of commodity; music is now created for the sake of sale and not the sake of art. Thus, Adorno contends that because popular music no longer stands against oppressive forces in society, but rather stands alongside them, it cannot be considered art; popular music submits to the authority of commercial success:

*What are emancipated from formal law are no longer the productive impulses which rebelled against conventions [...] in capitalist times, the traditional anti-mythological ferments of music conspire against freedom [...] the representatives of the opposition to the authoritarian schema become witnesses to the authority of commercial success.*⁹⁶

What Adorno is attacking here was the relationship between society and the industrialisation of music in his time. On turning his attention towards music, he argues that evidence of the domination of the culture industry is present within popular music itself. In *Music and Mass Culture* Adorno argues that popular music is standardised; everything has been diluted to the point where everything sounds the same as everything else and songs conform to set types. He contends:

*The whole structure of popular music is standardised [...] standardisation extends from the most general features to the most specific ones. Best known is the rule that the chorus consists of thirty-two bars and that the range is limited to one octave and one note. The general types of hits are also standardised [...] such as mother songs, home songs, nonsense or "novelty" songs, pseudo-nursery rhymes, laments for a lost girl.*⁹⁷

Adorno believes that this has had a negative effect on how people listen; he is an advocate of structural listening - that great works of music should rely on the unfolding of harmonies and the overall structure of the piece. However, he believes that popular music

⁹⁵ I Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* JC Meredith (trans.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, pp. 61-75.

⁹⁶ TW Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening", in *PPR.301: Aesthetics - Course Reader*, 2012, pp. 280-315, pp. 290-1.

⁹⁷ TW Adorno, "Music and Mass Culture", in RD Theodor (ed.) *Essays on Music*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2002, pp. 437-447, p. 440.

instantly gratifies the listener with the familiar: "People have learned to deny their attention to what they are hearing even while listening to it."⁹⁸

There is an important question to address here: why does Adorno believe that the popular music industry is in such a bad state of affairs? Surely one of the good aspects of popular music is the ability to share appreciation and experience? Adorno believed that the situation of music in the 20th century presents serious consequences. As we have outlined, Adorno saw that the industrialisation and standardisation of music is evidently a bad thing because the mundane sameness of it all has turned us into passive spectators. Thus, Adorno believes that this has inhibited the possibility of a creative response that has been substituted for that of a production team working on behalf of the music industry, pushing music into society for the purpose of sale. In Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, he argues that our earliest response to art has important repercussions for our morality. In Schiller's view, through exercising our imaginative capacity we are able to recognise that we are not just a part of nature as it is; we are able to understand that we can change our reality. It is through our imagination that we are able to perceive of a reality different to the one that we face.⁹⁹ Adapting this view, Adorno fears that the culture industry provides a standardised aesthetic education that will hinder our imaginations to believe that situations cannot be other than the way they are. Hence, if we are to accept his modernist view, we can now see why popular music is of great concern to Adorno.

Another 20th century philosopher sceptical of popular music is Robin G. Collingwood. In *The Principles of Art*, Collingwood tries to answer perhaps the biggest question in aesthetics: what is art? He is specifically concerned with what he calls 'amusement art', which includes popular music, and as this is my concern I will refer to it in this context. To address this question properly he looks at what he believes to be an incorrect assessment of art proper, the notion of 'pseudo art'; something that is not art but has been mistaken for art.¹⁰⁰ Collingwood's argument against popular music is purely aesthetic; he wants to establish a theory of art proper and simultaneously expose that popular music is not art. He does so by drawing upon the Greek theory of art, the notion that art, like carpentry or blacksmithing, is in fact a craft. This is known as the 'technical theory' of art.

Collingwood refutes the technical theory of art, aiming to disassociate art as we know it entirely from this. To do so, he outlines six essential features of craft and then expands on this by arguing that not one of these necessary features of craft is an essential feature of art. These six necessary features are (1) that craft always involves a distinction between actions for the means and ends (2) there is a distinction between planning and execution (3) means are always prior to ends in execution, but ends are prior in the process of planning (4) we can always make a firm distinction between the raw material and the finished product (5) there is a distinction between form and matter, that is, craft is the transformation of raw material in to a finished product (6) in craft there is a hierarchical relation between various crafts.

For Collingwood then, these necessary features of craft are not necessary features of art. Craft is not appreciated for its own sake in the same way as art, but rather for the ulterior purpose that it serves. Art proper does not necessarily have a distinction between the means and the ends, nor does it involve a distinction between planning and execution. The artist, Collingwood argues, often does not know in advance what the final product will be before they begin to create, for art is exploratory. That is not to say there is no planning or technique to art, but rather that there are artworks that do not contain any of these necessary features of craft - but this does not detract from them. For example, the composer may begin playing around with certain chords to see where it is they will take them and what feelings they will

⁹⁸ Adorno, *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*, p. 289.

⁹⁹ N Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Clarendon Press, New York, NY, 1998, pp. 78-80.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 50.

stir inside of them. The creation of art is a process in which, more often than not, the artist only knows what the piece is about through the creation process - the artist will discover the ends through the means of creation. No craftsman could proceed in this way; they must always have a pre-conceived idea of both the ends and the means.

Collingwood also outlines the features of craft that we can distinguish between the raw material and the finished product, and that a distinction between form and matter is also not necessarily true of art. We may conceive of the composer arranging tonal melodies into a sonata, but this is not the same as the tanner turning animal hides into leather. Nor may we conceive of the transformation of these materials into the finished product like we are able to in craft – in art, they are intangible. Finally, Collingwood argues that there is not a hierarchical relation between various arts, something that is necessarily true of craft. The artist may be inspired by other art forms, i.e. the musician may be inspired by poetry, but they exist in their own fields without having to build upon one another.

It is important for Collingwood's argument that he must outline these features of craft, as he believes that it is the technical theory of art that causes people to identify popular music as art proper, when in fact it is pseudo art. Collingwood believes that popular music however, is indeed a craft - the craft of arousing everyday emotions. He argues that popular music

*[is] as skilfully constructed as a work of engineering, as skilfully compounded as a bottle of medicine, to produce a determinate and preconceived effect, the evocation of a certain kind of emotion in a certain kind of audience.*¹⁰¹

Therefore, from Collingwood's perspective, the purveyor of amusement art is essentially a craftsman.

Collingwood's theory of art proper is exploratory; true art is the exploration of feelings unique to the artist in question. Collingwood notes

*when a man is said to express emotion [...] he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is [...] from this helpless and oppressed condition he extricates himself by [...] expressing himself.*¹⁰²

Art proper is a process in which the artist is attempting to clarify a feeling unique to the artist in question. There are no rules or techniques; in the same way we may shout at someone to express our anger and come to understand it, a true artist must do likewise. The intention of art proper is not audience-directed but rather a process of expression personal to the artist. There are no techniques that they may employ to 'get it right' because the emotion is indefinable; they must work through those feelings for themselves, almost therapeutically, until the artist is prepared to say 'that's it!' If succeeding with this, the audience takes the role of 'the understander' rather than that of the spectator; should the artist explore their emotions thoroughly, the audience will come to understand the emotions expressed by the artist, and not just reacting to an emotional stimuli. So Collingwood's theory of art can be explained thusly: art proper is not generic or formulaic in its ends or its means but rather is the clarification of a vague feeling. Amusement art, on the other hand, is in fact formulaic in its ends and means, and thus aesthetically impoverished.

I would now like to turn my attention to two essays in the field of aesthetics that perhaps provide us with some insight into the 'form' and 'matter' distinctions, both of which will be outlined respectively. Eduard Hanslick's essay *The Beautiful in Music* is a formalist account of musical aesthetics, and while it is not concerned with popular music like the above discourses I have examined, it is relevant as it is concerned with the nature of beauty in music

¹⁰¹ R Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945, p. 81.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

generally. Hanslick is directed against the notion that the beauty to be found in music is in its ability to represent feelings, but this does not mean that music is destitute of feeling either. For Hanslick, while it is true that music does indeed evoke feelings in the listener, unlike poetry or sculpture, it does not convey definite, tangible conceptions to us. Thus, he contends that we cannot truly understand the nature of the beauty in music if we base our judgement on emotions as the source of aesthetic judgement. For Hanslick, although the beautiful does conduct emotion, to understand what is beautiful in music we must establish the nature of the beauty of music, distinct from the feelings it may arouse in the listener; feelings are subjective and, adopting a Kantian approach to aesthetics, judgements of beauty must be objective.

Hanslick believed that sensation - that is, the experience of a sound or colour and feeling the experience of joy or sadness that may be conjured from art - is something that we experience with all art and is not exclusive to music. Hanslick wrote: “[A]n art aims, above all, at producing something beautiful which affects not our feelings, but the organ of pure contemplation, our imagination.”¹⁰³ To elaborate, Hanslick believed while listeners will always have the tendency to allow our feelings to be aroused, our imagination, in the same way a composition originates in a composer’s imagination, allows us to contemplate the beautiful in music intelligently; while it is our feelings that are the initial spark of aesthetic contemplation, it is with our imaginations we can perceive beyond these feelings and examine the true nature of beauty in music.

For Hanslick, the nature of beauty in music is specifically musical. The beautiful in music is not dependent on anything exterior to itself; he writes: “[A]n aesthetic analysis can take no note of circumstances which lie outside the work itself.”¹⁰⁴ The emotional effects, or subject matter that may have inspired a piece of music is not related to the content of the piece of music. The content of a piece of music, he believes, is the individual tones that make up the composition. Hanslick argues that the content of music is its own melodic themes presented to the listener through the formal structure of the music. For Hanslick, therefore, form and content cannot be separated from one another; in music, the form is its content and its content is its form. Thus, Hanslick believes that the beautiful in music lies in the co-ordination of the intrinsically pleasing tones and sounds; the entire scale of notes are the crude material that is fashioned into beautiful melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. These separate tones are all distinct from one another and yet are logically connected by a composer to form a self-sufficient whole. He contends that melody is the primary source of musical beauty; harmony has the ability to transform and intensify the piece with endless possibility; while rhythm is the ‘main artery of the musical organism’, it regulates the piece of music, enhancing the role of each individual sound in the piece. So for Hanslick ultimately, to truly hear a piece of music and understand the beauty of it, we must actively listen to its form, paying attention to how it has been created and anticipating the development of the composer’s design.

Having looked at the ‘form’ and ‘matter’ distinctions, I will now examine the material account of the aesthetics of music. Bruce Baugh’s *Prolegomena to any Aesthetics of Rock Music* is concerned with the aesthetics of ‘rock music’. More specifically he is concerned with the experimental rock music of the 1960s and early 70s making reference to artists such as The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and Cream. This is relevant, as *Pet Sounds* is largely considered to be a seminal album of this musical era. Baugh opens up some preliminary discussion concerned with defending the aesthetic worth of rock music against elitists such as Adorno. Although Baugh doesn’t have much to say about Adorno in this essay, he had previously criticised him for elitism in a 1990 essay in which he wrote, “[Adorno’s] position rests on a

¹⁰³ E Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music: A Contribution to the Revisal of Musical Aesthetics*, 7th ed., G Cohen (trans.), Da Capo Press, Inc., New York, NY, 1981, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 103.

misapprehension of the nature and capacities of popular culture, and that is particularly evident in Adorno's treatment of popular music."¹⁰⁵

In Baugh's prolegomena, he tries to establish whether rock music has standards of its own which uniquely apply to it. He believes that the majority of 20th century aesthetic discussion on popular music has taken a misstep, as it has attempted to evaluate rock music by examining it with the traditional musical aesthetics that is based upon European concert hall music. Baugh contends "the difference between rock and "serious" music is that rock belongs to a different tradition, with different concerns and aims."¹⁰⁶ He argues that while traditional musical aesthetics is concerned with form and composition, an aesthetics of popular music should be concerned with the matter of music; its material and visceral qualities, and how it makes us feel physically. "[The] material or "visceral" properties of rock", Baugh expounds,

*are registered in the body core [...] rather than in any intellectual faculty of judgement, which is why traditional aesthetics of music either neglects them or derides them as having no musical value.*¹⁰⁷

To establish a framework in which Baugh believes an aesthetic theory of rock music can be built, he believes it is best to turn to traditional formalist aesthetic theory on its head. For Baugh, the aesthetic judgement of the formalist model does not do rock music justice because it normally has a simple formal structure. Thus, when applying the formalist model to it, we would reach the conclusion that it is simple, boring and has no aesthetic value. Baugh believes the material qualities should be the primary focus of an aesthetics of rock music; the beautiful in rock music is based on the individual sounds, but specifically on how they affect us. He argues that the timbre of the individual sounds should be our primary focus, how it is the notes sound to us in relation to the rhythm and volume and not in their relation to the other sounds and structure of the overall piece. The skill of the rock artists is to experiment with these material properties in order to find the right expressive qualities or until it 'sounds right'. "Rhythm, the expressivity of the notes themselves, loudness", Baugh elucidates, "these are the three material, bodily elements of rock music that would, I submit [...] form the basis for a genuine aesthetics of rock."¹⁰⁸ For Baugh then, the expression of the tones played within a piece, and how they are able to make us feel, is where we discover the aesthetic worth in rock music.

It can be described then that the four aesthetic dimensions of a work of art in music are: individual musicianship (which shall be referred to autonomy for the purposes of this essay), expression, form, and matter. Now that we have examined these discourses, I would like to assess *Pet Sounds* alongside them.

III. The Aesthetics of *Pet Sounds*

Now that I have outlined some of the considerations of what is aesthetically valuable in music, I would like to turn my attention to examining *Pet Sounds* from these perspectives. In this section I intend to examine *Pet Sounds* alongside the aesthetic discourses outlined in the previous chapter, making reference to the conception and composition of the album in order to examine its aesthetic merit. This section therefore has four parts, reflecting the four aesthetic dimensions of a work of art in music.

¹⁰⁵ B Baugh, "Left-Wing Elitism: Adorno on Popular Culture", *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 14 (1), 1990, pp. 65-78, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ B Baugh, "Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock Music", in P Lamarque & SH Olsen (eds.) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1993, p. 498.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 499.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 503.

a) A Modernist Approach to *Pet Sounds*

Returning to Adorno's discussion on the commoditisation of the music industry, *Pet Sounds* was released at a time when the commercialisation of popular music was rife within the business, and *The Beach Boys* were right at the heart of it as one of America's biggest-selling rock bands. Their two albums prior to *Pet Sounds*, (*Today!* and *Summer Days (and Summer Nights!)*) had both charted at #4 and #2 on the Billboard album charts respectively, and had produced a number of hit singles from both records. However, as commercially successful as *The Beach Boys* were, in 1965 Wilson made it clear that he was apathetic to the wishes of the executives of the record label for any follow-up album he would write. *Pet Sounds* - before it was even so called - was destined to be a work of complete creative autonomy.

A close look at *Pet Sounds* provides evidence of this artistic autonomy, present when examining the history of the inclusion of the seventh track: *Sloop John B*. It was the first song to be composed by Wilson with thirteen expert session musicians employed to help him record the album. However, it was in fact Wilson's brother Carl Wilson who was the main advocate of recording the song, and the track was set aside while Brian worked on the rest of *Pet Sounds*. The first single to be released from *Pet Sounds* was *Caroline, No*, the album's melancholy closing track. However, when it failed to generate strong sales, Capitol quickly released *Sloop John B* as a single, which achieved a much greater reception.¹⁰⁹ *Beach Boy* member Al Jardine explained that "'*Sloop John B*' was important to Capitol - it meant that they had a hit single on *Pet Sounds* [...] Capitol said, 'we need a single. How are we going to sell this thing?'"¹¹⁰ Despite pressure put upon Wilson to record music that would generate sales for Capitol, the main driving force of *Pet Sounds* was his passion to create a work of brilliance and put forward the unique ideas he had for it. The 'authority' of commercial success that Adorno believes dominates the industry, was secondary to Wilson's vision of creating the best album he could.

Adorno's concern that the commoditisation of music has resulted in a regression of listening could perhaps ring true in the case of the U.S. release of *Pet Sounds*. *Pet Sounds* was the first *Beach Boys* album that failed to achieve a gold record award; the 1966 Grammy awards also snubbed it. After the lukewarm reception of *Pet Sounds*, and attempting to avoid total commercial failure, the executives at Capitol released *The Best of the Beach Boys* shortly after, peaking at #8 in the album chart, and qualifying for a gold record award within weeks.¹¹¹ Adorno believed that genuine art should attempt to liberate itself from the social situation it is surrounded by; art should stand against the authoritarian schema that has industrialised the music industry. *Pet Sounds* is an example of art doing just that. The executives at Capitol Records poorly received *Pet Sounds*; they wanted more of the same material in the vein of *Fun, Fun, Fun* or *Surfin' USA*. However, Wilson wanted to remove himself as far away from that music as he possibly could and create what *he* wanted to create. *Pet Sounds* was an artwork of complete autonomy.

What of Adorno's criticism that popular music has become standardised? Adorno argued that there is a rule of popular music that the chorus is constructed of 32-bars and that those songs follow simple structures. Throughout *Pet Sounds*, Wilson modifies the popular 32-bar A-A-B-A song pattern in order to suit the needs of his music. For example, on the eighth track of the album, *God Only Knows*, Wilson uses contrasting vocal interludes on the bridge and a round-style vocal section to the ending, using these breaks between verse and chorus to help the song to unfold in a rewarding, and meaningful way. Wilson expressed that

¹⁰⁹ T Gracyk, *Listening to Popular Music: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Led Zeppelin*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 2007, pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁰ Granata, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 186.

*[he] would like to see longer singles - so that the song can be more meaningful. A song can, for instance, have movements - in the same way as a classical concerto - only capsualised.*¹¹²

As an advocate of structural listening, *Pet Sounds* seems to adhere to the Adornian aesthetic that applauds music for being non-commoditised, but also for its non-standard arrangements and structures. Thus, from an Adornian perspective, it seems viable to argue that *Pet Sounds* is a work of genuine art.

b) An Expressionist Approach to *Pet Sounds*

I would now like to examine *Pet Sounds* with the expressionist theory of art as detailed in *The Principles of Art*. Collingwood argues that popular music is not art but is rather a craft, the craft of arousing everyday emotions. The true artist however, uses art as an expressive format for non-garden variety, complex emotions. The artist must work through these emotions in order to gain a clear understanding of them, and, if successfully doing so, we as an audience will undertake the role of an ‘understander’.

If we recall what was outlined in my introduction, before Brian Wilson began to write *Pet Sounds* he had suffered from a tremendous mental breakdown brought on by a period of excessive substance abuse. His emotional state before, during and after the writing of *Pet Sounds* (and still to this day) is almost unimaginable, and to help him overcome the aftermath of this breakdown, he began to express himself musically.

*Following his cataclysmic breakdown, Brian began intensive “music therapy”, spending most of his time devising ideas and melodies for the mature projects he planned to do [...] while his contemporaries wrote idealistically about social issues, Brian turned inward for inspiration. His emotions - and the words that describe them - were dramatic, intense and, and personal.*¹¹³

Pet Sounds was a lot more for Wilson than just an attempt to create a great album; for him, it was an attempt to help him understand the complex emotional state that he was going through. Talking about *Caroline, No*, Wilson explained that “it’s a pretty love song about how this guy and girl lost it and there’s no way to get it back. I just felt so sad, so I wrote a sad song.”¹¹⁴

I feel it is very important to note here that while it was Wilson who composed all of the music and came up with all the concepts of the songs, he decided to turn to a young man working in advertising named Tony Asher for lyrical musings. Wilson could have very easily written the lyrics himself, but he wanted a clean break from all of *The Beach Boys* previous music to establish himself as a more sophisticated writer. Asher, describing the writing process, recalls that

*I talked about my relationships and Brian [Wilson] talked about his. Much of what comes from this [...] this sort of creative process is sparked subconsciously, and those subconscious thoughts were ignited by the mood of a discussion Brian and I might have had a few hours, or even the day, before.*¹¹⁵

While Wilson knew the emotions he wanted to express, and what he wanted his songs to represent, he craved the fresh perspective of Asher who he contemplated and discussed these complex emotions with. Wilson and Asher constructed songs together that made the emotions being expressed accessible for all men.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 58-61.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 112.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 86.

The album is heartbreakingly expressive throughout. The level to which Wilson is able to explore his emotions through the music on *Pet Sounds* is, from my perspective, nothing short of breathtaking. Take, for example, the album's fourth track *Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)*. The song details an introspective view on a crumbling romance, but the intense emotional detail expressed not only in the lyrics, but also the brooding arrangements of string and electric instruments, portrays emotions so vivid you come to understand the situation that the song describes perfectly. A moving melodic line of string instruments leads the song's verses, playing diminished chords on a low register; they highlight the dark expressive tone of the unease of knowing that the relationship is coming to an end. The chorus, however, does not necessarily express pessimism. As Wilson sings: "Don't talk put your head on my shoulder/Come close, close your eyes and be still/Don't talk take my hand/And listen to my heart beat, listen, listen, listen." All the while, the sombre tone of the instrumentation eases and, for a moment, the atmosphere seems much calmer, as the scenario the lyrics express suggest it would be.¹¹⁶

If one were to attempt to criticise *Pet Sounds* on Collingwoodian grounds that popular music is the craft of arousing everyday emotions, I would contend that this is not the case. Wilson has often been quoted as saying that *Pet Sounds* is a "heart and soul album [...] they were all inspirational songs [...] there's a lot of love in it."¹¹⁷ While the album puts forward a very optimistic message about life and love, some of the more downbeat songs particularly *I Just Wasn't Made for These Times*, I have found are very personal to the listener; you truly understand the emotions expressed by Wilson. The feelings expressed on the album, are not emotions that are easy to describe, nor do they seek to make the listener feel a certain pre-conceived way. It is a work of sheer artistic expression.

While I could talk about the expressivity of every single song on *Pet Sounds* (perhaps with the exception of *Sloop John B*, being as it is not an original song by Wilson), this would be too exhaustive a feat for this chapter. However, as we have examined, Wilson's approach to musical expression on *Pet Sounds*, is unlike anything that was heard before in popular music, and perhaps even since. For a Collingwoodian approach to aesthetics then, there is a level of expressivity on *Pet Sounds* that allows listeners to glimpse at the inner turmoil of Wilson during the time of its creation, and that allows us to understand the level of emotion that he had expressed throughout the entire album. But through Wilson's lyrical musings with Asher we are also able to access more easily emotions that most men feel at some time in their life. Therefore, if we are to examine *Pet Sounds* alongside Collingwood's aesthetics, we can very easily argue that it is a work of art proper.

c) The Formal Aesthetics of *Pet Sounds*

Let us now consider the formal aspects of *Pet Sounds*, the arrangement of the music itself and how Wilson crafted it. The majority of popular music in the 1960s had a very simple formal structure, including a lot of the earlier *Beach Boys* music. For example, *The Beach Boys* 1963 hit *Surfer Girl* follows a standard thirty-two bar form structure, four eight-bar sections in an AABA pattern, something of a standard practise in American popular music that began in the 1920s.¹¹⁸ However, what is unusual and special about the earlier *Beach Boys* music (and while not something Wilson would perfect until *Pet Sounds*) is the sophistication of trio, quartet and quintet vocal harmony. Wilson had been singing alongside his brothers (Dennis and Carl Wilson) and cousin (Mike Love) for many years; they were voices that he knew almost as well as his own, and Wilson was able to arrange vocal harmonies as if instruments

¹¹⁶ B Wilson & T Asher, "Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)", [B Wilson, Performer] on *Pet Sounds*, Hollywood, CA, 1966.

¹¹⁷ Granata, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁸ A Wilder & JT Maher, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1990, p. 56.

to be picked up and played. Chuck Britz, the primary sound engineer for *Pet Sounds*, said of the harmonies “they were six voices that blended beautifully, and Brian knew how to make their voices sound like instruments.”¹¹⁹

Hanslick believes that harmony has the ability to transform and intensify the piece, contending that melody is the primary source of musical beauty, while rhythm regulates the piece of music. Wilson was able to utilise vocal harmonies to intensify instrumentation, provide the main melody, and also supply rhythm. The album’s eleventh track *I Just Wasn’t Made for These Times* is a great example of this. In the break between the verses, and before the chorus, the three-part vocal harmony consists of the lead vocal singing “Sometimes I feel very sad”, while the first counter line sings “Ain’t found the right thing, I can sink my heart and soul into” and the second counter line sings “People I know don’t want to be where I’m at.”¹²⁰ Here, we have three different vocalists harmonising with three completely different lyrics, separately intensifying the various instrumental sections, providing a melody and also providing rhythm; this is all the while they fit seamlessly together.

This is not the only example of vocal harmony providing so many key formal components; the tracks *Here Today* and *God Only Knows* both contain sophisticated vocal weaving as main components of the songs. Vocal harmony, however, is just one component of the short symphonies that Wilson created for *Pet Sounds*. The album contains delicately crafted string, brass, reed, percussive and electric sections, as well as instruments completely unconventional in popular music of the 1960s - and to the present day; this included the Electro-Theremin, bicycle bells, dog whistles and Coca-Cola bottles.¹²¹ Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the formal arrangements of *Pet Sounds* is that Wilson did not utilise such a level of instrumentation purely for the sake of doing so; he could hear the arrangements in his head before he had recorded them. Marilyn Wilson, Wilson’s wife, recalls that:

*Brian heard the music, the different instruments, the harmonies of the voices, and the production at the same time. He wrote, arranged, and produced it all! It was all there in his mind and people would just look at him in amazement.*¹²²

Wilson did not stumble across the music he was creating by accident or through experimentation; he could hear the songs in his mind and would stop at nothing until his arrangements sounded just like the ones he had imagined.

Having examining these factors of *Pet Sounds*, it would seem unjust that a formalist, such as Hanslick, could deny the aesthetic merit of the intricate designs that Wilson envisioned. Every single aspect of the musical design of *Pet Sounds* - the instrumentation, the vocals and production - were arranged with such care and intricacy that, I believe, to deny *Pet Sounds* of aesthetic merit on formal grounds is incongruous. Examining *Pet Sounds* from a formalist perspective, there is much beauty to be observed in Wilson’s carefully crafted arrangements, taking into account the melody, harmony and rhythm of each individual piece of music.

d) The Material Aesthetics of *Pet Sounds*

Finally, I would like to consider the material aspects of *Pet Sounds*, and how the emotiveness of the individual tones are able to affect us viscerally. In a 1966 interview during the making of *Pet Sounds*, Wilson - speaking about music - stated:

¹¹⁹ Granata, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

¹²⁰ Wilson & Asher, “I Just Wasn’t Made for These Times”, on *Pet Sounds*, Hollywood, CA, 1966.

¹²¹ Granata, *ibid.*, pp. 135-165.

¹²² Granata, *ibid.*, p. 59.

*[T]his is one of the wonderful things about this art form - it can draw out so much emotion, and it can channel it into notes of music in cadence. Good emotional music is never embarrassing.*¹²³

This sentiment is something that Baugh would certainly agree with. After all, he believes the aesthetic worth of rock music comes from the expressivity of the performances.

Throughout *Pet Sounds*, Wilson incorporates metaphoric instrumentation in order to express more than just a message in a song; Wilson actually lays out the physical emotions he experiences into the music. Perhaps the best example of this comes in *Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)*, where the Fender bass line personified a beating heart in the line: "Listen to my heart beat. Listen, Listen, Listen."¹²⁴ The expressivity of the notes here goes beyond making the listener feel a certain way; the music is able to transport the listener into the scenario described throughout the song. Wilson wanted the instrumentation of the notes to express his feelings *exactly*. For the introduction to the second track *You Still Believe in Me*, Wilson experimented for hours to create an ethereal sound. Lyricist Asher explained that:

*Brian held down the keys on the keyboard, and I leaned way inside the piano to pluck the strings so they'd ring... I tried everything, hairpins, bobby pins, paper clips, and my fingers. We did take after take, but finally got the sound that Brian wanted.*¹²⁵

This again is reflective of Wilson's skill as an expressionist. If we recall, Baugh believes that the skill of the rock artist is to experiment with the material properties of the tones until it 'sounds right'. Wilson was prepared to go to great lengths to get the perfect expressive qualities for his music. When it comes to closing *Pet Sounds*, Wilson knew exactly what he wanted: a non-music section to end *Caroline, No*. As the warmth of the bass flute ends the sorrowful final track of the album, we hear Wilson's dogs barking as a train rumbles past and off into the distance (Wilson was able to acquire a train whistle in order to create this effect in studio). The listener, after having been drawn in to Wilson's world of longing, heartbreak, and yet hopeful optimism, is suddenly left to reflect on what they have just heard. Even the album's progression and ultimate end was carefully considered to provide a certain material effect.

Presented above are but a few examples of the material aspects of *Pet Sounds*; every tone of every instrument, every beat of each percussive instrument, and every note sang, was carefully considered by Wilson in order to express a certain emotive theme in each of the songs. The vast array of emotions that are expressed on *Pet Sounds* are simply too great to name, and some, unnameable. Baugh believes that rock music should be based on the expressivity of the songs and how they are able to make us feel. For Baugh, this is where we discover its aesthetic dimension. If we are to accept Baugh's view, and to argue that this is what an aesthetics of rock should achieve, it appears sound to argue that *Pet Sounds* is one of the most aesthetically rich rock albums ever created.

As previously mentioned, the four discourses I have used to examine *Pet Sounds* with are in no way exhaustive. However, they do bring up a number of key positions in aesthetic consideration; the idea of 'high' and 'low' art forms, artistic autonomy, and the form and matter aesthetic distinction. When examining *Pet Sounds* in reference to any of these positions, I believe that it shows itself to be an aesthetically rich, autonomous, delicately crafted, and emotionally affecting work of art. *Pet Sounds* is an album that will transcend place, time, and historical context. Its unparalleled sound, emotional content, and incomprehensibly delicate arrangement show it to be more than just a great historical

¹²³ Granata, *ibid.*, p. 73.

¹²⁴ B Wilson & T Asher, "Don't Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)".

¹²⁵ Granata, *ibid.*, p. 150.

timepiece of production values and a demonstration of what music can be. It is a full-fledged work of brilliance, and it will be considered to be so for years and years to come. I believe that when giving careful aesthetic consideration to *Pet Sounds*, taking away elitist preconceptions and examining it irrelevant of any sort of stigma of popular music, it is certainly aesthetically rich.

V. Conclusion

From the aesthetic criteria that I established in the first chapter - that is, autonomy, expressivity, form, and matter, I would contest that *Pet Sounds* is aesthetically valuable: Wilson was primarily concerned with his art and not the Capitol executives; the use of the album expressed Wilson's intense emotional state; there is great elegance in the arrangements of all instrumental and vocal parts, and; Wilson arouses a strong emotive response from the listener. To some this may seem a controversial claim to make, but I do not think so. If it is true that art is beautiful in its own right, without serving any ulterior purpose, and irrelevant of time or social context, then I believe that judgements of great art should be recognised regardless of time, context or medium.

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