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EMBODIED DISRUPTION

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis offers an interreligious cultural analysis of faith, not as a comparative study between traditions, but as an inquiry rooted in embodied epistemology. Drawing primarily from Christianity, Islam, and Secularism—with Buddhism providing structural support and Taoist thought influencing non-dualistic themes—this work defines faith as radical faithfulness to one's own experience, marked by openness rather than absolute commitment. It argues that what is often called "truth" is merely faith that has been absolutized and idolized, undermining critical reflection. As both argument and example, this thesis introduces *Embodied Disruption* as a new method of research—one that refuses objectivity and instead centers lived experience, contextuality, and the disruptive impact of authenticity on dominant systems of meaning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1.

A NEW KIND OF PEOPLE

Introduction

The story is poetically impactful and full of absolutized language, not as truth but as an effect to spark curiosity. So here is a story.

Light in darkness. Chaos in order. Justice amid injustice. The unknown goes before humanity. Each person trudges forward unaware of what is to come,[1] for each person must walk forward whether they will or not[2] unaware of what is to come, something, anything,[3] nothing,[4] being, non-being, heaven, nirvana, paradise, hell, torment, a nightmare,[5] or something else entirely. Birthed alone and dying alone, the only guarantee is oneself, and even of that, there is no guarantee.[6] But forward, each nomadic

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[1]Quoting and referencing Derrida, Paper Machine "Perhaps" is the only way to say yes to the future. John Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5, Kindle.

[2] In response to a man dying and struggling to come to terms with death, an ordained Buddhist practitioner reminds the dying man that change is inevitable, especially as it relates to death, when he says, "Wherever we go, it's always like this." Death comes whether we will it or not. Steve Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple: The Practice of Being Aware, Right Now, Every Day* (Tokyo: TUTTLE Publishing, 2013), 51, Kindle.

[3] Hope of an afterlife.

[4] Atheism

[5] H. P. Lovecraft, The Call of Cthulhu, vol. 11 (Weird Tales, 1928), 1. This work is an existential dystopian interpretation of reality. What if instead of a cosmic good or a cosmic God this world is subject to.

[6] The teaching of no self has been held for over a thousand years in Buddhism. See LLaumakis Stephen, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy,* 2nd ed., Cambridge Introductions to Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2024), Kindle. Mark Siderits, *How Things Are: An Introduction to Buddhist Metaphysics,* How Things Are, Kindle Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), Kindle. It is also a byproduct of contemporary scientific thought, especially a result of scientific determinism, which teaches our actions are determined since we are no more than the rest of particles see,

tribe goes with sacred texts and traditions in hand, assured of what is to come. For others, it is not assurance but faith. And for others, not faith but hope.[7] As the nomadic tribes move forward, claiming ultimacy, they resist every threat of alternate beliefs from outside their group. This reinforces internal hegemony and solidarity as group members assure each other of what is to come after this life.[8] This assurance comes at a cost to others. Artificial constructions create certainty where it does not exist. These artificial constructions lead them to deny the common humanity of people outside their group, creating them and us, an in and out, a saved and damned, a reincarnated, and one who has broken the reincarnation cycle. Each group claims to possess the ultimate truth. Yet, as these hegemonic groups marched forward into the future, they began to splinter and lose some of their members. The members they lost resisted hegemony because they denied the oppressive and hegemonic nature of truth. Instead, the reformers posited their truth of radical inclusivity. They saw all the groups, both theirs and the others, as seeking and experiencing God under different names.[9] Although these reformers came from separate traditions, they joined one another and established a new progressive group around inclusion. They established a shared vision, one not grounded in certainty of what comes after death, for they saw the future as unforeseeable, and they embraced ambiguity.[10] However, even though they did not claim to know the future, they claimed to know how

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[7] Scott Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 182, Kindle.

[8] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution And Taboo*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 141.

[9] Religious progressives

[10] The liberal academy embraces the unknowability of the final truth, what happens when one dies.

to live justly in the present, an ultimacy of ethics.[11] They claimed to know how to journey towards what is to come. They employed words, philosophy, and education. Even though they claimed truth as provisional, they acted in the same manner as the other nomadic tribes. Although they claimed to resist hegemony and absolute truth, they created their own. They promised liberation, but they became what they resisted.[12] Like the tribes they attempted to reform, they created an us and them around a new praxis of radical inclusivity. However, some individuals broke away from this new group. Unlike the original tribes (religious traditionalists) and reformers (religious progressives), these nomads wandered guided by nothing but the honesty of their experiences. An honesty that laid bare their souls to the world. They journeyed and talked with one another, cross-pollinating their traditions, rejecting them entirely, or seeking new ones.[13] They journeyed into the future tribe-less with no comfort of a group. They are not committed to a group but to authenticity. What looked like constant change and instability to the tribes they left was honesty, the refusal to lie about one's religious experiences.

Losing their group and truth, which not all saw as loss, they found something else: the treasure of honesty. Unlike truth, honesty does not ask the impossible (a correct interpretation of the world). Unlike the burden of truth, honesty gives joy and freedom to be honest, acknowledging that honesty is all anyone can give.

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[11] Religious progressives often teach the future is unknowable, but how to live in the present is not.

[12] Amy-Jill Levine and Warren Carter, "Imitation, Accommodation, and Resistance Coexist," in *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 14.

[13] Many religious nones become people of multiple religious identities or reject their tradition and all others.

What is there to be accountable to except one's experiences? If one is faithful to their experiences, an act of embodied honesty, what is there to fear? A person's experience is all they have. So, honestly, these seekers traversed an unknown terrain, not knowing what is true. Instead of taking faith and idolizing it into truth, they chose honesty. No one tells them what to think or where to travel. Any barrier or line of crossing becomes erased. Radical authenticity filled their steps. Accountable to nothing but their authentic experiences, they wandered. Into the future, they walked and pondered, and upon a gruesome sight, they all stumbled. They stumbled upon a dying and tortured animal. Its name, Truth. The other tribes had passed by, reviving it, barely enough to survive.[14] But then, these tribeless pilgrims passed one by one. As they passed, they kneeled and looked Truth in the eyes. They saw tears streaming down her cheek; beyond saving, they gave her every comfort they could. They were with her until the end, holding and comforting her.[15] After she passed, they wandered again, the only ones who witnessed what had happened. They always kept Truth in their hearts, but knew they could not stay because nothing was left. Truth is gone. But they honored her and kept her in their heart, a memory of an old friend- left behind but never forgotten. Truth was dead.[16] With Truth gone, they pondered and thought. What is left? Honesty is all that is

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[14] Many people do enough philosophical and or religious work to convince themselves that truth is still a valid category of inquiry and then stop. They are not willing or cannot accept that truth has died. This is the common refusal to come to terms with that which challenges ones worldview.

[15] Some love the truth of modernity but have stared into the depth of knowledge and realized its passing. Honoring her passing by grieving the role she once played.

[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Delhi: Grapevine India, 2024), Prologue, Section 2.

left. They realized honesty could never be Truth. Truth was alive, something to behold, but honesty is what happens after Truth's death. But then, as they journeyed and thought they had grasped something profound,[17] they realized they were deceived.[18] Then, in the middle of the night, these pilgrims awoke in a fright. Truth was nothing more than a passionate, real, heart-gripping dream but illusionary. What did they do? They grieved and reverently marched into the future. But as they awoke from their nightmare and walked into the unknown, the tribes they had left marched forward, still asleep, unaware of what happened.[19] So they stepped forward into the future in the only way they could, honestly.

Thesis

This paper argues that truth as a philosophical or religious ideal can become problematic. Truth as a category often becomes an expression of the certainty people crave. What people call truth, at times, is faith that has been idolized and made absolute, an idol. When people absolutize truth, harm can easily follow. Many religious traditions, especially Christianity, have struggled with the tension between truth and faith. This has led many religious practitioners to experience existential angst. This paper proposes that burying the truth and encouraging a focus on a person's experience in its place appears to be a more coherent category: trust in one's embodied experiences. In this new

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[17] The idea that they had deconstructed truth which has philosophically stood for thousands of years.

[18] They realized that truth was always an illusion. It never was what it seemed. It had always been an imposition or wishful thinking of some, a refusal to accept the ambiguity of existence.

[19] Many are unwilling to face the philosophical death of truth.

framework, faith radically affirms one's contextual experience and subjectivity. It has the potential to remove the fear that stems from dogma and doctrine and is instead a radical affirmation of a person's individual experiences, whether God is real or not. This proposed theory is an invitation to the stickiness and messiness of life, resisting the urge for a universal systematization of life while honoring, respecting, and revering one's experiences as well as the experiences of others. In this framework, faith is defined as the honoring and submission of one's experience, and above all, it is an affirmation of the human experience in its totality. It humanizes. The West has worshipped reason as the Greeks did. However, when secularists conflate reason and truth instead of understanding reason and science as possible after a leap of faith (first principle), superiority can creep in over religious practitioners, an example of absolutism causing harm.

Faithfulness to one's experience (each person gets to define this for themselves), expressed as being *honest,* is a strong and coherent category for navigating the world. It is simple and intelligible to the academy and to people educated in religion and philosophy. When people engage in abstract philosophies and religious beliefs, self-contradiction often and easily emerges. Doctrine can lead to people ignoring what they believe in their heart based on their experiences. What people feel to be true (based on their experiences) is sometimes ignored because of authority from a religious text or cultural taboos. This is an example of how truth can become an oppressive category. This paper proposes an alternative category for people to engage in if truth has become a category of oppression for them: personal experience as the highest authority. Honesty about how one's experience has influenced one's beliefs and embodiment offers a way

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forward that is both self-reflexive and other-engaged, as others are part of an individual's experience.

Authenticity is expressed as radical honesty, a refusal to hide any intersectionality of one's identity and life experiences. It does not end in contradiction. It speaks from one's experience, not for other people.[20] It expresses how a person understands the world, not how the world is. It is kind as it leaves space and room for differences to coexist. What contradiction exists between two people who understand the world differently? It is a faith that is simple, requiring only honesty.

Being honest about how one's experiences shape one's beliefs and worldview allows reason and faith to coexist. Reason, especially in the West, is often seen as ultimate. Even the most abstract existential moments that skirt logic are only intelligible due to reason (mental processes). In line with Western thinking, faith can be seen as complementary to reason. Reason can be understood as how a person processes information. Faith can be understood as what one believes, considering their experiences (reason). This allows for faith and reason to be interdependent and not in tension. In this framework, faith and reason necessitate one another.

This paper's definition finds precedence in the Jewish and Christian Bible and Quran. These texts and traditions are multivocal and contain various depictions of faith. This study establishes its precedence of faith as faithfulness to one's experience based on selected readings. This author understands these ideals of faith to be more attainable and

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[20] Speaking "from not for" a tradition was first brought to this author's attention by Dr. Rachel Mikva Chair of Jewish Studies at Chicago Theological Seminary

reasonable in the pluralistic West. This experiential faith is put forward to demonstrate a more liberating alternative than faith as belief in that which is objectively true is a demanding standard to live up to. Faith that is absolutized is understood as an idol, where faith is elevated above its contextual experience into platonic notions of truth. Faith as faithfulness to one's experience leaves more space for God to be a valid category in the modern world, where technological inventions and profound societal advancements often threaten traditional categories of faith, religion, and belief in God.

This paper seeks to establish faith as an equally valid category for constructing meaning in life and navigating the world. It does this by showing the limitations of truth and how it often undermines itself. Ironically, to resurrect faith and God as valid categories in the modern world, this paper demonstrates the weaknesses found in models that ignore experience and elevate truth as ultimate. The most devastating critiques of faith came from Frederick Nietzsche, the one known for killing God.

Nietzsche killed God, as in he believed truth put God to rest. However, what became lost in Nietzschean discourse (and, to an extent, modern discourse) is that every so-called *truth or belief* contains a leap of faith- an assumption that cannot be objectively proven. With the shortcomings of truth analyzed, God and faith will be demonstrated to be equally competitive categories for societal and social discourse as secularism(s).

This paper proposes this interpretation of faith as a new method and a field called Embodied Disruption. Embodied disruption does not skirt theology. It attempts to transcend the secular and religious binary. For example, theology from Classical, Interreligious, Liberation, Womanist, Queer, Decolonial, Political to cultural studies, critical theory, and social justice studies tend to presuppose an almost platonic ideal and

objective. Even postmodern and secular studies that aim to circumvent absolutes often functionally end up with their platonic notions of truth expressed as new impositions expressed in beliefs and practices to belong. Embodied Disruption does not have a static object of study for research, as is often the focus in secular and religious research.

Embodied Disruption has four components: 1) **Embodied Disruption evaluates one's contextuality**. This includes groups of belongings, individual experiences, and beliefs. The self is laid bare to oneself. It is an act of radical honesty and vulnerability. It forces one to admit internal and lived contradictions without judgment. 2) **Embodied Disruption then analyzes the disruptive results of their contextuality on systems of meaning-making encountered in one's life**. These systems include religions, philosophies, and worldviews related to sex, gender identity, sexuality, race, etc. It asks: What is the effect of authentic and radical embodiment of myself on the various spaces I inhabit? It does not hide parts of one's identity but opens itself to vast vulnerability. As anthropologists say, it is not an "armchair discipline." It requires lived and embodied experiences that refuse to avoid spaces where one's identity is not welcome and learning from these experiences. **3) Embodied disruption requires vast interdisciplinary knowledge and the ability to synthesize information from disparate fields**. This method refuses narrow specialization. It goes beyond theology by requiring an analysis of as many possible disciplines in analyzing one's contextuality as possible, not just a single discipline. It treats the subject, the self, as a singular, wholistic, interconnected entity to itself and one's environment. Embodied disruption's closest relationship in academia is cultural studies. However, it does not privilege one or two aspects of culture as many cultural theorists do. It is a radical embrace of diversity that prioritizes breadth. Instead of

a box of compartmentalized knowledge, it is a spider web where seemingly disparate data is spun into a unified whole. It removes itself from a singular field of study by continually asking how one's embodiment (ever-changing and evolving) disrupts the various systems of meaning one encounters. 4) Embodied Disruption analyzes authentic embodiment's negative and positive effects on the various meaning-making systems one encounters with the analytical goal of liberation.[21]

Embodied Disruption took inspiration from this author's positionality as a Quranist Muslim who believes that ambiguity and the fluidity of meaning are part of how God speaks in an ever-evolving world (experience). Inspiration is taken from a passage of the Quran where it gives instructions on how to interpret it:

> Some of its verses are definite in meaning - these are the cornerstone of the Scripture – and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning (Quran 3:7).

Within my context, justice is understood as the cornerstone, the non-ambiguous of the Quran. The call to justice may be clear in the Quran, but its execution in society is ambiguous. Because the execution (how the Quran applies justice to specific rulings in its own time) is an extension of justice, these ambiguities must be avoided and not absolutized. Rabbi and scholar Rachel Mikva demonstrate this tension in discussing Jewish law and the tension between God's absolute truth and human application, "There is a Divine standard [(I understand this to be justice in the Quran)], but it has always been

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[21] The idea of negative is taken directly from Rachel Mikva, *Dangerous Religious Ideas: The Deep Roots of Self-Critical Faith in Judaism, Christianity, And Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020) Kindle.

mediated humanly [(cultural and contextualized application)]."[22] Likewise, Jacques Derrida demonstrates the strength of this type of distinction when discussing law. He says, "law (droit) is essentially deconstructible, whether because it is founded, constructed on interpretable and transformable textual strata…Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible."[23] Although this interpretation of justice as an ideal striven for but never fully captured is not in alignment with the history of Islamic thought, a Quranist reading allows room for such interpretations by skirting the authority of hadith and embracing ambiguity. This author takes the Quran as God's literal word, but because of this is committed to ambiguity. The Quran is deconstructible yet perfect, reflecting the indestructible (justice).

Embodied Disruption becomes a contextual embodiment of submission to the Quran within this new and experiential framework, which merges philosophical and Quranist thought. Islam means submission. Embodied Disruption asks people to be obedient to their experiences above all. One who is obedient submits to their experiences. Submission is where the name Muslim comes from. This paper defines Muslims as obedient (submit) to their experiences and radical inclusivity. Because they submit to where their experiences lead them, they are in favor with God. Submission to one's experience is the highest honor to God, not belief(s) in God, doctrine, dogma, or a

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[22] "Rachel S. Mikva," Chicago Theological Seminary, accessed August 19, 2023, https://www.ctschicago.edu/people/rachel-s-mikva/.

[23] Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14.

particular worldview. In the Quran, God and justice are inseparable.[24] Therefore, all who

are doers of justice are in God's favor.

People who fulfill justice (by being obedient to their experiences) fulfill God's

sacred duty of submission. This is why Embodied Disruption can be understood as

compatible with Islam; it elevates submission as ultimate. This paper exemplifies this

new field (Embodied Disruption) that advocates for social justice, starting with oneself.

In America's diverse context, Embodied Disruption is needed more than ever.

Presuppositions

This paper aims to undermine the concept of truth. In its place, obedience to

personal experience is proposed as an act of faith(fulness). Embodied Disruption is a way

of navigating a more coherent and consistent world than truth: a friend rather than a God

one should fear. It is a radical embrace of what is, the present. It "is not based on any

conception or belief; it is [experience]…"[25] Experience shapes beliefs and metaphysics,

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[24] "But it is only the rebels He makes go astray: those who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed, who severed the bonds that God has commanded to be joined, who spread corruption on the earth – these are the losers" (Qu'ran 2:26-27). It was not Us they wronged; they wronged themselves" (Qu'ran 2:57). "Truly those who do evil and are surrounded by their sins will be the inhabitants of the Fire, there to remain, while those who believe and do good deeds will be the inhabitants of the Garden, there to remain" (Qu'ran 2:81-82). "Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together" (Qu'ran 2:148). "Anyone who does good of his own accord will be rewarded, for God rewards good deeds, and knows everything" (Qu'ran 2:149). This is only partway through the second chapter. The Qu'ran is proliferated with verses demonstrating that God and justice are inseparable.

[25] Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, 2. Experience is added by this author, which changes the original intent's meaning. The author says, "direct experience." In both cases, the focus is on what is immediate (experience). The author mistakes what is most immediate for the impossible, "direct perception).

but it is dynamic, fallible, and evolving. Experience is the focus because it appears that it is all that anyone has and cannot be transcended. Experience encompasses a person's education, spiritual encounters, etc. It appears to be all-encompassing and total. Within this framework, there is nothing more one can be accountable for than their experiences in life.

This paper's claim is bold. Readers will likely contest the definition of faith provided (submission to experience). The Bible and Quran will be briefly analyzed to demonstrate that faith is a matter of submission to experience, not beliefs. Peter and Abraham serve as powerful examples.

Examples of Faith

Faith, defined as faithfulness to one's experience, is demonstrated in the Quran, New Testament, and Hebrew Bible. The irony is that many religious adherents are quick to believe doctrine from the heroes of their faith, but they are unwilling to live how they lived. This demonstrates a radical disconnect. The fruits of faith are worshipped (the conclusion their figures came to), but they are unwilling to embrace the ambiguity and paradox of faith. For example, in the Christian Bible, the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter acknowledges that experience is the ultimate authority, overriding the Bible. God asks Peter to break laws found in the Hebrew Bible.[26] In Peter's experience, God shows no concern for the text. God situates their command and Peter's experience (which includes

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[26] "[11] He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. [12] In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. [13] Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." [14] But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." (Acts 10:11-14 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition: NRSVue).

God) as the ultimate authority.[27] Experience as ultimate is demonstrated in the Quran. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son. His son agrees to be sacrificed. God spares his son.[28] In both stories, people's direct experience is the highest authority, not text, dogma, scripture, or even the believing community. Many are willing to believe what Abraham and Peter believed. However, few are eager to follow their example and do as they do. If people were to live a life of faith like the heroes they admire, God (justice) would take them into the unknown—a holy act of faith, not certainty.

Faith (defined this way) is not playing it safe. It is full of risk, confusion, and contradiction. The Quran and Hebrew Bible (Jewish and Christian) demonstrate this when Abraham leaves his family for God. In the Bible God says, "Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1 NRSVue). Abraham did not know where he was going, but reason would lead any sane person (as it did with Abrahm) to trust his experience of God speaking. Likewise, in the Quran, God tells Moses, "I am God; there is no go but Me, so worship Me and keep up the prayer so that you remember Me" (Qu'ran 20:14).

The most reasonable decision in these examples is being faithful to personal experiences. The confusing practice many contemporary religious readers make is believing that the experience of those who wrote the sacred books they read is binding on

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[27] "[15] The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 10:15 NRSVue).

[28] When he had become old enough to partake of his father's endeavors, Abraham said, "O my son! I see while dreaming that I am to sacrifice you. So consider, what do you see?" He replied, "O my father! Do as you are commanded. You will find me, God willing, among those who are patient" (Surah 37:102, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Harper One, 2015) Kindle.

the reader. It is difficult to hold that another person's experience can be binding on oneself. Following this logic (other people's experiences should be followed), Abraham should have followed his father's religion (which the Quran and Bible forbid). It appears more sincere and reverent to honor others by following their example, not believing as they did. Sadly, this is what many people are doing in their faith tradition. Those who look on and judge those journeying and seeing what appears to be constant change unknowingly condemn the examples of faith in their sacred text(s). Many religious communities that focus on correct belief (truth), who hold much power over their members, ostracize and marginalize their members who embody these examples of faith.

This paper assumes that power, expressed as domination, is today's central issue. It serves as an act of resistance to the erasure of those faithful to their experiences, often marginalized by their faith communities. Inspired by work in colonial and decolonial studies, mainly from Dr. Bo Myung Seo, this project's presuppositions follow his belief that "…the central issue facing today's world [is] that of domination. Domination is always based on power, forcing its will, interest, and logic unto others."[29] Power does not remain neutral, but it has a way of forcing itself upon others as it is often used by those who claim truth. Truth frequently wields power, erases difference, and enforces hegemony (conformity). One of the greatest danger of truth in society is when a culture or group conflates "ontology [ethics] and ideology [identity]."[30] This can be seen at large in America with Christian Nationalism. Identity (Christianity) ethics (evangelical social

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[29] "Bo Myung Seo," *Chicago Theological Seminary*, accessed February 2, 2024, https://www.ctschicago.edu/people/bo-myung-seo/.

[30] Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 4.

beliefs) become conflated with law and social norms. Those who deviate from social pressure face social and sometimes legal consequences. This leads to epistemicide. Boaventura de Sousa Santos defines epistemicide as "… the murder of knowledge."[31] This paper seeks to address this erasure from the positionality of the author, what the academy oppressively labels religious *nones*.[32] It is not accidental or insignificant that nones have become nobody, nothing, *none*. Resist domination!

Religious Nones

In the legacy of institutional colonialism, the academy has systematized and oppressively labeled those who do not fit traditional categories. Here is an overview of what they have to say. The nones are those who do not fit traditional categories, religious or secular. According to scholars, this group makes up 28% of the American adult population[33] and is comprised of atheists, agnostics, and those who are 'nothing in particular.'"[34] This last subgroup, "nothing in particular", compromises "19% of U.S. adults.[35] According to a 2018 survey by the General Social Survey (GSS), this group

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[31] Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 92, Kindle.

[32] This paper uses nones without quotes or capitalization as a refusal to acknowledge this oppressive categorization.

[33] "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," Pew Research Center, January 24, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/.

[34] Shawn M. Rill, "Oppression Against Atheists," *The Elm: Voices and Opinions* (blog), September 9, 2022, https://elm.umaryland.edu/voices-and-opinions/2022/Oppression-Against-Atheists.php.

[35] "People Who Describe Their Religion as 'Nothing in Particular,'" Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center, 2023-2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-family/nothing-in-particular/.

rivals "… Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants" in size and is projected to be the largest "religious group" in America.[36] Ironically, those who wish to resist categorization and labeling have been systematized, studied, and treated as a religious group, giving the oxymoronic name none. What is there to study if these people are labeled as none or nothing? Naming demonstrates the oppression that is at work in the colonial academy.

Studying Nones

The study of nones is often oppressive as it labels those who refuse labeling. To name those who refuse to label is to assign to human beings what they have unassigned to themselves. Many religious nones are people who were religious but disaffiliated themselves with religion, "There is no segment of American society that has been immune to the rise of religious disaffiliation."[37] This means that labeling people as nones, especially for the "nothing in particular" group, is a form of oppression. Naming nones forcibly categorizes and assigns a religious title to a group belonging to those who refuse it. This refusal often comes at the cost of family and community, with much heartache. To categorize those who wish to refuse categorization is of the utmost disrespect to alternate religious embodiment. It ignores the social cost of religious disaffiliation for the sake of commodification or objectification through studies that name and categorize people, treating them more like animals than a person.

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[36] Ryan P. Purge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 32.

[37] Ryan P. Purge, The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 93.

In American history, naming precedes dominating. Columbus demonstrated the domination of naming as he began America's colonizing history. Tzvetan Todorov captures this well in *The Conquest of America*, "Like Adam in the midst of Eden, Columbus is profoundly concerned with…names for the virgin world…he seeks to rename places… is equivalent to taking possession…these lands are henceforth part of the Kingdom of Spain."[38] Todorov demonstrates how naming implies superiority, authority, and domination (cf. Adam). It is essential to clarify what Todorov leaves implicit. Naming originates from a position of power characterized by self-perception of ownership and superiority, leading to hegemonic control. The known atrocities of Columbus speak for themselves. It is no accident that naming precedes colonization and extermination with Columbus.

Trump is a modern-day example of the coupling of naming and domination. On January 20th, 2025, Donald Trump took his position as the 47th president of the United States of America, renaming lands both foreign and domestic as a precursor to colonization. In his inauguration speech, he praises genocide as an American ideal, "And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars…"[39] Manifest Destiny is "the belief that it was our duty to settle the continent, conquer and prosper."[40] First comes colonization, then naming.

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[38] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1984), 26–28.

[39] Trump, Donald J., "The Inaugural Address," January 20, 2025, Rotunda, U.S. Capitol, The White House, https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/?utm

[40] "America's Manifest Destiny," Smithsonian American Art Museum, accessed February 2, 2025, https://americanexperience.si.edu/historical-eras/expansion/pair-westward-apotheosis/.

Regarding colonization, he says, "The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation — one that increases its wealth, expands its territory…"[41] Then comes naming, "we are going to be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America."[42] He intends to rename the indigenous land in honor of an American president: "We will restore the name of a great president, William McKinley, to Mount McKinley."[43] Likewise, referring to the Panama Canal (which does not belong to the United States), he says, "We're taking it back."[44] Where there is domination, naming is nearby as its twin oppressor. As an act against naming, this paper will describe people who do not fit traditional religious categories as a liberating alternative to naming.

Redefining Nones

This paper seeks to reinterpret nones (in a more liberating way) as those whose highest commitment is not to a particular religious tradition but to a specific principle or ideal (such as justice or truth). This avoids giving religious labels to those who have already rejected them. Nones here are understood as those who do not fit in traditional spaces even though they sometimes inhabit them. Their commitment is not to tradition or space but to ideals. Not none, as in no identity or a new label. But rather none, as a description of the inability to bring all one's intersectional identities into meaning-making spaces without disruption. I was raised Christian but could not bring all of my

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[41] Trump, "The Inaugural Address."

[42] Trump, "The Inaugural Address."

[43] Trump, "The Inaugural Address."

[44] Trump, "The Inaugural Address."

identities as a gay and open-minded person. I then became a person of multiple religious identities. This was intellectually satisfying but left me feeling empty, and without community. Islam was the first space where all of my intersectional identities were welcome, where disagreement was welcome within the family of faith instead of threatening my family status.

These people (nones) often have a central theme: a commitment to a principal(s) that sometimes transcends how their group constructs meaning. Within this context, faithfulness may be seen as a commitment to truth, justice, or a different set of values. The common ground is honesty wherever it takes a person. People like this sometimes move between religions, stay on their own- but silently, sometimes adopting several traditions, none, or returning to familiar religious contexts but refusing to be boxed in by the tradition. They/this author is one individual who moves beyond postmodernism by embracing a commitment of radical self-love by refusing to hide their identities in religious and secular spaces and welcoming the following disruption. Disruption is not through disagreement but by honesty, a refusal to conform to group norms and beliefs in denial of personal experiences.

Aim

This paper is an Embodied Disruption to traditional academic norms that privilege narrow expertise. Students at elite institutions and public universities must choose a hyper-focused study area. Not only are they forced to specialize narrowly in fields, but personal faith commitments, in the name of neutrality, must be left at the door when doing so-called *objective research*. When applying to Arizona State University, an R1

research university, for the PhD program, this author was told that one's belief and faith are not "a part of what we do." That "I need to go elsewhere for that."[45] Academia has adopted two assumptions that colonize knowledge. 1) True research is objective, and faith has no place. 2) True expertise is narrow specialization. These assumptions are embedded in academic institutions. If a person wishes to teach at a graduate research institution like this author, they are often forced to attend an R1 secular research-intensive university. Sadly, this frequently destroys students' alternate epistemologies, conforming them to the secularism they desperately resisted. This epistemicide and colonial education dominates the American academy. It is an arrogant assumption that faith in pure logic and objectivity has somehow done away with faith, forgetting that even science and so-called "objective studies" are not immune from the necessity of assumptions and faith.

As someone who is neuro-divergent (ADHD, OCD, and SPD (Sensory Processing Disorder)) this paper is a testament to polymathic thinking and construction where profound integrated synthesis and application of various fields resist narrow academic specialization. The privileging of siloed specialization has privileged thinkers deemed "normal" by the academy. This has led to the loss and epistemicide (erasure) of many needed insights that divergent and emergent thinkers possess. For example, this thesis results from starting and stopping four different theses to stop, synthesize, integrate, and apply the research results into one cohesive argument for contemporary social justice in America. This type of research resists institutional and structural models of education by

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[45] This was said in transparency, not in a disrespectful manner. Upfront honest as this should be commended. Few R1 institutions are as open and accommodating as Arizona State University.

serving as a testament to the rigor and insights of the non-linear and hyper-interdisciplinary model made possible only by the author's institution, Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), and thesis director, Dr. Bo Myung Seo, who waived numerous course milestones and requirements. The waiving of linear requirements is a testament to the structural privilege of neuro-dominant individuals. Attending CTS, a graduate research theological institution leading cutting-edge interdisciplinary work has made this work and others like it possible. Unlike most religious and secular spaces, it does not assume objectivity (academic gatekeeping) but encourages alternate ways of education, embodiment, and disruption as foundational to education. The aim of this paper is not visibility but rather a disruption of the status quo in academia through authentic embodiment where "I recognize myself as a center."[46] What this paper does and elucidates is not possible in most academic institutions due to colonial education. Now, to bury God so that God may be resurrected.

God's Death

"God is dead."[47] These are the famous words of Nietzsche. God's death is not the death of an entity but a fatal blow to human knowledge: the inability to honestly know anything, the finality of subjectivity. God's death was trinitarian. Ontology (the idea that the universe has an underlying structure), truth (the concept that can prescribe how people ought to act), and theological anthropology (a unified interpretation of what it

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[46] The original wording for the word "recognize" is a different tense "recognized."

[47] Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Prologue, Section 2.

means to be human) have all become passé. When Nietzsche pronounced this death of God, he did not realize that faith was not entirely done away with. Like a prophet or seer, he saw a storm approaching from afar but pronounced God's death not with objective proof but as a reasoned act of faith based on his experiences. Ironically, he critiqued faith (God) with faith (his scientific presuppositions). In his wake, Postmodernism and Meta-modernism followed. God was not killed; a specific outdated version of God was laid to rest.

In the postmodern and Nietzschean critique of God, a new one was set up. What belief can avoid making itself absolute? Boaventura De Sousa Santos captures this well in *Epistemologies of the South*. This new movement (postmodernism) is revealed as hypocritical, "the old orthodoxy [modernism] was replaced by the new one [postmodernism]… What was rebellion [postmodernism] became conformity [postmodernism as the new absolute truth]."[48] In positing postmodernism as absolute truth, this "new orthodoxy" utilized the tools of modernism (reason, logic, and rationalism) to create its absolute truth of relativism.

The Contradiction of Truth and the Future

Attempting to understand the future using truth (religious or secular) quickly leads to contradiction. Using reason alone, the most coherent and rigorous way to say yes to the future is to accept the unknown. John Caputo captures the uncertainty that faces humans and the finitude of human knowledge. Quoting and referencing Deirdre, he says,

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[48] Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7, Kindle.

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"'perhaps' is the only way to say yes to the future."[49] The future (what metaphysics and ontology pretend to understand) is uncertain. Caputo captures the philosophical implications of this well, "'Perhaps'… [is] a way to stay on the tracks of something unknown, something structurally to come."[50] What is to come, if anything, is beyond human understanding. For those who are religious, one can "hope, or wish it [for a specific version of the future to play out], but [they] can't believe it… beliefs must be evidence–sensitive."[51] To put one's religious "hope" on the level of truth feels comes across as a confusion of belief (evidence-based) and faith (hope).

His philosophical analysis focuses on the nature of reality (truth). He seeks to remove truth (ontology) as the center using "weak theology."[52] He describes "weak theology" as "operat[ing] in the spooky, shadowy order of the event, where the event is best addressed, and perhaps only addressed, in the fluctuating shadows and spectral grammar of 'perhaps'…an archi-assent [assenting to the event, not his interpretation]."[53] As Caputo attempts to move beyond truth, he seeks to obtain a logical, true answer within human knowledge's limitations. His embodied paradox of the death of truth is demonstrated by his unwillingness to let God die, "God is a name for the event, but the very idea of an event prevents us from saying the event is God because the very idea of the event is that I cannot see it coming." Caputo attempts to speak in alignment with the finitude of human

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[49] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 5.

[50] Caputo, 6.

[51] Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe,* 182.

[52] Caputo, *The Insistence of God,* 9.

[53] Caputo, 9–10.

knowledge while still coming to a "true" conclusion. Instead of seeing truth as untenable, he empties it of any significant meaning, undermining his enterprise.

His theology, Perhaps, may be the most rigorous and honest answer to the question of "what can be truly said about the future." However, his argument breaks down. He seeks to resist the notion of truth while relying upon it (the event) and attempting to reconstruct it (His "*Perhaps*").

CHAPTER 2.

THE DEATH OF TRUTH

Truths Philosophical Death

Rene Descartes demonstrates an intellectually honest way to move beyond truth. Descartes, in his famous *Meditations on First Philosophy,* demonstrates the difficulty in arriving at true knowledge. 1) Knowledge is received "through the senses" but cannot be fully trusted because "the senses are sometimes deceptive."[1] If all knowledge can only be received through the senses, the senses are fallible. If the senses are fallible, then on what basis can one be confident that their knowledge is not the result of faulty senses? 2) Insanity is an even more poignant argument against true knowledge (truth). Regarding the insane, "they steadfastly insist that they are kings when they are utter paupers, or that they are arrayed in purple robes when they are naked…"[2] Being insane is often a radical self-delusion. If being insane is a radical self-delusion, then to be insane is not to know that one is insane. Being insane is a judgment pronounced by others. The insane person's world is coherent and understandable. In light of this how can one know if they are insane? As one looks upon the insane with pity, it is difficult to be confident that they do not share the same illusionary state.

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[1] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy In Which The Existence of God And the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 14.

[2] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 14

3) The notion of sleep challenges truth. People cannot rule out that their perception of reality is not a byproduct of being "asleep."[3] Not only "are [there] no definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake from being asleep…[but people have] been deceived…by similar thoughts in [their] dreams!"[4] This argument can be made more persuasive when simplified to the following. If being asleep is an illusory state and one cannot distinguish between being awake and asleep, how can one know that one's current reality is nothing more than the mind's constructions during sleep? One may wake up at any moment to realize that all is a dream.

4) His most devastating critique of truth is "an evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me [where everything perceived and thought are] hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares…"[5] A variation of this teaches that the world was created minutes ago by a demon who implanted false memories of the world into every person's mind. The world is only minutes old, making reality itself based on an illusion.[6] This demonstrates the universal human predicament. Humans do not know the true origin or ultimate truth underlying the world; any framework is possible. This appears to be the implied premise of presuppositions. His argument can be made more compelling when utilizing first principles with mathematics, something he did not intend.

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[3] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 14

[4] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 14

[5] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 16

[6] This version was made aware to this author in Philosophy 101 at Chandler Gilbert Community College, further info unavailable.

Rene Descartes's proof against knowledge is not ultimately compelling unless it is explained in terms of first principles. The first principle aims to understand how knowledge is possible. It teaches that knowledge must "begin with the beliefs we initially accept [assumptions]."[7] Knowledge is impossible without starting from an assumption, even for so-called "objective disciplines" such as science. The book *Writing Culture* demonstrates rigorously that science, within its discipline and methodology, cannot justify itself as actual knowledge. Science as genuine knowledge begins with a subjective leap of faith necessary to give itself the credibility it claims.

> Science "had to look outside its own discourse for justification, to seek legitimation in a discourse that was other than its own and not subject to its rules. It needed a discourse that could not be part of the selfperfecting discourse of science or foundational in any scientifically acceptable way. Science chose an uneasy compromise, subjugating itself both to the discourse of work (politics and industry) and the discourse of value (ethics and aesthetics)…[8]

Science can only claim finality if one assumes, without empirical evidence, that it represents the highest truth. Put differently, science cannot use itself (its means and methods) to validate itself. Science is one of the most valuable tools in human history but one of the most difficult to justify objectively. In popular culture, people use it to claim absolute objective truth and knowledge. Yet, it cannot use itself to confirm that science is the ultimate source of objective reality and knowledge. Science cannot use scientific methods to prove its validity. Science becomes of value after one puts faith in it. Like all forms of viewing the world, science is a form of faith, first principles, starting

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[7] Terence Irwin, ed., *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press, 2010), 3.

[8] Talal Asad, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document, Kindle Edition," in *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 125.

assumptions, and presuppositional beliefs that make the world intelligible and give it meaning.

This is not to say that science does not give objective results, such as planes being able to fly and cars being able to run. However, science, like theology, is subject to the same problem of infinite regress. The history of science demonstrates frequent reinterpretations based on new data that transcends past theories. Knowledge and the universe are so vast that it is possible that getting a larger framework for scientific knowledge that disputes contemporary theories is itself an infinite regress. In this sense, science may be functionally true or objective, but like every other discipline, it cannot transcend contextuality.

Now that first principles have been demonstrated to be foundational to human thinking and truth, Rene Descartes' original arguments can be taken further. Returning to the first principles of Descartes, one will notice that the scenarios above, insanity, sleep, and a demon of deception, are all first principles- a way the world is presupposed to be before thinking and analyzing begins. Thinking and processing the world without starting from an assumption is impossible. Try it. It is impossible because every thought, whatever it is, contains a presupposition. First principals are required to think. Thinking begins when faith in one's perception of the world based on first principles is legitimized.

Numerous first principles can be used to interpret reality, suggesting no neutral view of the world. Every worldview, whether religious or secular, is based on a different first principle: Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Atheism, Agnosticism, and all their internal diversities, as well as every other religion that is practiced, emerging, has died out, lost to history is based on a different first principle.

Acknowledging that one's experience helps determine what appears true is a helpful way out of this predicament. However, how does one account for the diversity of religious and non-religious experiences? In the end, we are all humans on a journey that is far beyond each of us. Honesty about one's experience and how it affects embodiment is a helpful way forward.

When analyzed considering statistics, the first principle (starting assumption of the world) that makes the world intelligible demonstrates the improbability of any person's view of the world is true. The statistical proof is simple. There are an infinite number of ways the world can be. In other words, how many possible frameworks exist for understanding the world? The limit is one's imagination stretching to infinity. Whatever framework the reader of this paper holds is one possibility among infinity. As a fraction, this is $\frac{\infty}{1}$. Every person has a one-in-infinity chance of their first principle (view of the world) being correct. As a percentage, this looks like 0. 00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000%. One may ask where is the.001% The 1 in this line of 0's can only come after an infinity of zeros. This is what it means to have a one-in-infinity chance. In other words, any person's view of the world is so implausible that it may never come to pass. If it does come, it comes like the one after an infinite number of 0s.

Can your view ever be said to come? Yes and no. Can a fish fully understand the river it swims in? No, and neither can people fully understand the river of life they swim in. Postmodernism has damaged its reputation. A more gentle and friendly claim that there is no truth is that people cannot transcend their experiences and dynamic embodiment. People exist in their environment, like a fish in the water. This applies

whether God exists or not; to be human is to be situated in a particular context. Descartes did not thoroughly develop this point, but first principles, when applied to statistics, are one of the most potent proofs that can humble theist, non-theist, trans-theist, agnostic, or atheist. To be human should mean bowing one's head in submission to one's experience and being humble.

David Hume dealt a blow to truth in relation to ethics that philosophers are still attempting to solve. In his *A Treaties of Human Nature*, his is/ought distinction demonstrates morality is not an entity. Therefore, it does not belong to reason or fact; "morality… consists not in any *matter of fact*, which can be discover'd by the understanding."[9] Morality is not an object that can be studied. This is often phrased as follows: "You cannot derive an ought (morality/value statement) from an is (the way things are/a fact)." The power of this insight can be devised from playing out a simple scenario. Imagine that a person has robbed you, beat you, and left you for dead. Is there any fact that proves this is wrong as a matter of truth? Even if God is real and has a law, does that fact negate the reality of freedom? What people label morality or truth can be easily understood as persuasion.

Moral philosopher R.M. Hare makes a similar devastating case against truth (ethics) by analyzing how moral language functions, precisely the words *good*, *bad*, and *ought*. He demonstrates how these words are value statements, not facts. For example, good is not an objective entity. This can be shown by its ability to "be applied to any

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[9] David Hume, *A Treatise Of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 468, accessed March 24, 2025, http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.187695.

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number of different classes of objects."[10] There are good cars, tennis rackets, basketball

courts, buildings etc. Its ability to be applied to various objects demonstrates that good is

in the realm of value, not fact (truth). One may object: what about good people and bad

people? This is moral language. Moral language, good and bad, is "used for teaching

standards."[11] They do not describe objective, observable entities. Standards, by

definition, must be "public and commonly accepted."[12] These accepted standards imply

and necessitate some form of action. For example, "When we commend or condemn

anything, it is always in order… to guide choices, our own or other people's, now or in

the future."[13] Once the language of morals is analyzed closely, it becomes clear that

"ought" (morality) serves as a linguistic means of "prescribing" behavior in society.[14]

The words "good" and "bad" reveal what a culture or individual deems good and bad,

even as these categories are contested. Ought is imperative, a societal command grounded

in its expectation of its members to follow its value statements (morality). Hume's

distinction between facts and values and Hare's analysis of how moral language functions

as value statements to reinforce hegemonic cultural ideals demonstrate the philosophical

weakness of truth.

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[10] R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952)., Chapter 6, Section 2.

[11] Hare, Chapter 8, Section 3.

[12] Hare, Chapter 7, Section 1.

[13] Hare, Chapter 8, Section 1.

[14] Hare, Chapter 10 Section 3.

Truths Religiously Absurd Death

Truth in religion (morality) can coherently be interpreted as persuasion. The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University provides the following definition, "ethics is based on well – founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do."[15] Likewise, Gernot Böhmr, scholar in contextual ethics, says, "the subject matter of ethical theory and a practical ethical discourse is the judgment of good and bad, right and wrong."[16] However, these value judgments (which can never be facts) must have a source. The source is usually a system or framework. This can be done theistically, based on the divine command, or through philosophical and rational approaches (secular). However, all these approaches use ontology to argue how humanity ought to live.

Ethics prescribes how people ought to live. For example, Christianity teaches that God created human beings with a specific design and intention, known as their ontology. Some believe God created heterosexuality as the norm, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24).[17] This is heteronormative, "This event provides a marriage custom in which the man travels to his bride's home to negotiate the marriage contract and celebrate the

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[15]Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, "What Is Ethics?" Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, accessed March 24, 2025, https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/what-is-ethics/.

[16] Gernot Bohme, *Ethics in Context: The Art of Dealing with Serious Questions*, Cambridge (Polity Press, 2001), 20.

[17] New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

wedding."[18] The *Oxford Annotated Bible* further demonstrates the ontology of this passage expressed in heteronormativity when it says, "Sex between a *man* and *his wife* is regarded here as reflecting the essence of the connection God created between men and women."[19] Ontology leads to prescribed ways of being in the world. Other examples include women being prescribed to cover their hair (1 Corinthians 11), not being permitted to speak in the Church or have authority because of Eve's sin (1 Timothy 2), and homosexuality being deemed unnatural (Romans 1). Religious ethics usually invoke ontology (design or God's intent) even though the passages they appeal to are contextually situated.

Ontology relies on punishment and reward. Because America is deeply rooted in Christianity, religiously and culturally, Christianity will be the primary focus, although other traditions will be briefly mentioned. In Hinduism, reincarnation to higher or lower realms is based on how good of a life one lived, "according to their just desserts."[20] The founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha, likewise believed in reincarnation, although differently than "his *Brahmanic* contemporaries."[21] In Confucianism, ethical living is seen as "becoming more fully human."[22] This implies that those who do not live up to this standard are seen as less human. This is an example of a secular system. One can provide

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[18] *The SBL Study Bible: Including Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Harper One, 2023), Kindle. See note Genesis 2:24-25.

[19] Michael Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible*, 5th ed.(New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). See note on Genesis 2:24-25.

[20] Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 99.

[21] Smith, 163.

[22] Smith, 248–49.

examples from Islam, Taoism, and many other religious or secular traditions and

repeatedly see the same pattern emerge. Conformity to the ethical system is rewarded,

both in this life and in the next, and disobedience leads to punishment, also in this life

and the next. Reincarnation, heaven, hell, and the ideal human are all means of

motivating people toward conformity. Anthropologist Mary Douglas is worth quoting at

length:

> The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to
> control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external
> boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to
> reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and
> unstructured areas. For symbols of society, any human experience of
> structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand.[23]

Reward and punishment are not uniquely religious phenomena but human phenomena.

They apply to groups in general, including various religions, societies, and subcultural

groups to which one belongs. Reward and punishment, like punishment for children,

serve as motivational means, whether from people or God.

Regarding ethics, what people call truth appears more coherent to call persuasion.

Christianity serves as a good example. For example, many Christians believe that those

who do not accept Jesus as their savior will go to hell. There is no shortage of Bible

verses, but the actual argument is demonstrated by playing the scenario out of an

unbeliever (a person who intentionally does not accept Jesus as their savior and goes to

hell) to its logical end. Even if Jesus is God, and belief in him is required to go to heaven

and avoid hell, why should one be obligated to live in alignment with this? This question

demonstrates the power of the fact/value distinction. Even if the fact can be given (Jesus

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[23] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*. 141.

is God and unbelief or certain lifestyles send a person to hell), one cannot obligate anyone to obey God without resorting to the consequences, hell (a negative form of persuasion).

Simply put, "Why should I ask God to make me good when I want to be naughty?"[24] What can be said to the person who says, "I believe in God, and I believe Jesus is His Son, and that His rules and obligations laid upon humanity are clear"? However, I do not wish to abide by these and would rather live how I wish, do what I want, and then spend eternity in hell." Is there anyone who can intelligently respond to this using fact (truth) and not appeal to value statements (hell is bad). Does not the concept of heaven and hell, or more broadly, reward and punishment, serve as a radical affirmation that the human is free? If humans were not free, there would be no need for persuasion through such drastic measures (heaven and hell).

The dictionary definition of *persuasion* further reinforces this observation. Merriam Webster 3b says, "A system of religious beliefs[;] also: a group adhering to a particular system of beliefs."[25] Beliefs, especially ones tied to reward and punishment, are persuasive because they are part of a more extensive meaning-making system. Meaning-making is an effort to interpret the world, and can be described as internal logic. Religions are comprised of an *internal logic*. The influential work *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* describes this as, "rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition, a conception

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[24] Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, 98.

[25] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "persuasion," accessed March 20, 2025, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persuasion.

according to which the standards of rational justification themselves emerge."[26] The key is to recognize that these rewards and punishments embedded in systems are only persuasive to those who hold them. Everyone is in one. Other people's systems appear uncompelling because they have logic different from the logic of the system one is in. This demonstrates that the basis of religious ethics is often only compelling to those who accept the system's assumptions or internal logic. Understanding religious concepts of moral truth as forms of persuasion appears to be more accurate.

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[26] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* 7.

CHAPTER 3.

EMBODIED DISRUPTION

This paper has demonstrated that the concept of truth, as traditionally understood, can cogently be replaced with Embodied Disruption (faithfulness to one's experience). Modernism is outdated and cannot withstand postmodern critiques that threaten to relativize everything, including itself, within its context. There have been countless debates and literature around modernism and postmodernism. Yet, they all appear to end in contradiction. The great irony of postmodernism and secular reasoning is that both pretend to be more evolved than modernism while relying on the structures that uphold it.

Embodied Disruption avoids absolutes while allowing for them. It embraces radical subjectivity without contradicting itself, unlike postmodernism. It enables the claims of modernists and pre-modernists while simultaneously encouraging their critique. It ends in unbridled freedom, without imposition, yet permitting imposition. Unlike philosophy, it is an authentic and unapologetic embodiment that allows space for all forms of alterity, differences, metaphysics, and even scientific theories and discoveries. It is a radical yes and an embrace of subjectivity, embodied being, no matter its form. It does not distinguish between the oppressor and the oppressed, the just and the wicked, yet it endorses the critique of the oppressed against their oppressors while siding with the oppressors against the oppressed. Transcending dualism and monism, it is a radical yes and acceptance of all that is. It is not just a new form of scholarship but is committed to embodied disruption with the systems of meaning-making people encounter daily through

authenticity and honesty. It avoids self-contradiction that stems from theory while maximizing explanatory power through embodied experience.

Embodied Disruption avoids the pitfalls of traditional and postmodern absolutism. Traditional interpretations emphasize a philosophy as ultimate. In many cases, in the United States, this is some form of Christianity or secularism. In Postmodern spaces, intersectionality around marginal identities is deemed ultimate. Traditional modes of absolute truth and postmodern frameworks are becoming increasingly difficult to defend.

Postmodernism's failure is its absolutization of group identity and intersectionality. The group is often used to skirt individual accountability and becomes an entity that is more real than the individual. It raises group identity to a level of platonic forms that are used to create imposition on people in society. For example, gay, black, women, transgender, Muslim, Jewish, Pagan, and many other identities are oppressed in America. However, instead of being a platonic universal truth for every group member, it must be seen as a gradient of oppression based on one's context. There are gay, black, and Muslim people with varied stories. Some face more social destabilization than others. Group identity does not harm social analysis if taken to represent social structures and their general impact on the communities studied. This nuance is often missing from analysis and studies. Functionally, this has led to the absolutization of minority voices. This is not to say that these voices are not needed and essential. Embodied Disruption affirms they are needed more than ever; they are necessary in disproportionate numbers (more than the dominant group) to bring to light what has been forced to hide: voices that have been stolen. However, to see these voices as functionally infallible is to overcorrect culturally.

Enrique Dussel is an example of falling into the trap of overreaction. When comparing the center (dominant group and colonizers) to the periphery (non-dominant group and subject to the dominant group), he says, "these are the ones who have a clear mind for pondering reality. They have nothing to hide…Philosophical intelligence is never so truthful, clean, and precise as when it starts from oppression and does not have to defend any privileges because it has none."[1] He creates a new form of absolutization, one of the peripheries. His absolutizing of the oppressed leads to self-contradiction in his philosophy. His critique is based on positionality- the marginalized. If they are the purest that can ponder reality, does their framework not create another imposition? If their liberated voices were put in the center as the dominant group, and the periphery was put in the center, they would be subject to the same critique he leverages against the oppressors. Critique based on positionality alone leads to an equally failed solution of oppression. It establishes a new paradigm for oppression where minority voices can become the new voices of oppression. Does it make sense to say that one's position is what gives clarity, implying authority and objectivity? No. Embodied Disruption avoids this well-intended but underdeveloped pitfall in attempting to prevent absolutization and oppression.

Positionality and group identity fail when absolutized because they do not consider that group identity is not stable but in flux based on the space one occupies. Three examples from this author's group identities (white, gay, Muslim, and man) will be

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[1]Enrique Dussel. *Philosophy of Liberation*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1985.

used to demonstrate the possible reversals of the status of minority and privileged identities.

When celebrating Eid and walking to prayer in traditional dress, being white and dressed in what is racialized as "foreign" clothes draws more attention, confusion, and looks than people who are not white. In other words, because of negative assumptions made about foreignness and religion, there are some environments where people will be judged harsher for being white. However, ironically, my status as a white man allows for greater cultural weight and legitimacy of Islam as I am closer to the racist ideals of what the ideal person should be: white. This demonstrates that even whiteness is not immune from structural instability. Even something as dominant as whiteness can become minoritized in specific spaces. No identity is static.

Being openly gay is a minority status in Islam. It is usually viewed as negative. However, this negative status is not erased but partially offset by being a man. Not Islam itself or the Quran, but Muslim culture often favors men and can unintentionally fall into misogyny. In this context, having a higher social status than many women in my community grants a certain legitimacy to being gay.

Identities are never fixed; they are fluid and contested categories that carry different levels of acceptance and rejection based on their context. One's minority status as a Muslim becomes a dominant status at the Masjid (Mosque). Privilege is in flux, something postmodernism often overlooks. These examples demonstrate that minority and majority are not universal platonic concepts but are capable of reversibility; what determines this is the space one is in, which changes throughout the day and exists on a gradient from private (home) to public (the public sphere: politics, social media, etc.).

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Group identity and intersectionality are still some of the most rigorous and academic methodological tools for academia, which is why Embodied Disruption is based on it. Privilege changes based on space. In a Mosque, non-Muslims are the minority. In a gynecologist's office, men are the minority. This is why dominant group members can feel uncomfortable (I can speak from experience integrating into the Samali Masjid). When a person goes from a dominant space to a minority space, social nakedness is felt, being out of place and losing cultural currency expressed in power (the ability to influence the space). However, group identity scholarship has failed to grasp the potential of something bigger, the flux of privilege and minority status of each person based on space, not universal minority and dominant group status. Within these various spaces where minority and dominant identities are shifting, the Christian white male has the most power in the sense that they have the most control of the public sphere, including politics. It all comes back to power.

Embodied Disruption avoids these absolutist pitfalls because it is self-critical.[2] Embodied Disruption acknowledges that disruption is something that happens to others but also to oneself. It is a refusal to make any experience ultimate. It is a commitment to the process that continually shapes and reshapes every person if they are willing to be honest. It is an honor of the sacred we all share and experience. It requires humility because one does not know what disruption will be coming. Unlike the other philosophies and frameworks up to date, it is an inherently contextual, non-contradictory, self-critical,

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[2] Self-critical as a methodology was first introduced to this author by Rachel Mikva, *Dangerous Religious Ideas: The Deep Roots of Self-Critical Faith in Judaism, Christianity, Adn Islam, Kindle Edition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020). This work has influenced much of methodology of this paper.

experience-honoring, non-absolutizing, non-imposing framework that honors the full spectrum of human life, something modernism, premodernism, postmodernism, and meta-modernism struggle to do.

Embodied Disruption is expressed by submitting to one's experiences, an act of faith that utilizes reason in authentic and radical self-embodiment, accepting the liberating disruption in others and oneself. The beauty of Embodied Disruption is that it claims one cannot transcend their experience, for all that happens, whether physically or transcendentally, is part of it. Disruption, as philosophy, is a radical embodiment of honesty, not a philosophical construct to measure oneself or others against. Philosophy became so busy up there it forgot that life is lived down here. It negates any person as the authority over others and encourages what one can call "a 'sacred anarchy' [where God is not] a massive ontological power line…to the world, instead thinking of something that short circuits such power."[3] May disruption become sacred. Let nothing reign supreme except the submission of your experiences, whether God be in them or not. As each of us passes the dying animal of Truth, may each person commit the heresy against hegemony and look without fear. Let your group keep walking, dogma, rules, and tradition. And if you stop to look, you will notice that behind the dying and mangled animal, Truth is its source, its mother, Faith. Tall and majestic, she can be engaged and delighted in but never crystallized. And then, as you look out again, you see her dying children everywhere suffering slow and terrible deaths. The people took Faith and absolutized her into Truth. These absolutizations are these tortured creatures, a distortion of Faith in all

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[3] John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event,* Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 34, Kindle.

her beauty. In idol worship expressed in the crystallization of faith as truth, people forgot a more ancient and powerful secret: the authenticity of faith. The wandering people who never stopped to look thought they had faith. Still, if they stopped to look, they would see that they had an idol, a distortion of the original, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Romans 1:25 NRSVue).

Truth is dead.

Be faithful.

Have faith.

Wake up.

Disrupt.

The dead God is awake.

What happens next?

InshaAllah (As God wills).

This is my experience, what's yours?

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