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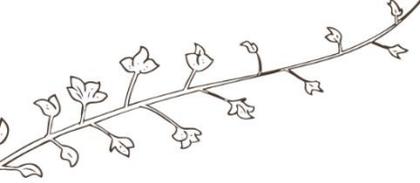
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# LOGOS-SOPHIA



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# Logos-Sophia

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## Foreword from the President of the Organization

My predecessor Eli Brown once said that “it cannot be said that the PSU Philosophical Society has never had an uneventful year” and that is certainly true for the 2020-2021 academic year. This past year has been a difficult one for many and the same can be said for the PSU Philosophical Society. While the pandemic proved itself to be quite the challenge, the Philosophical Society took that challenge head on, persevering through lockdowns and online learning. We continued to meet online via Discord which sparked numerous thought provoking & enriching discussions that this society has come to be known for. In addition, we are almost done putting previous editions of *Logos Sophia* on Digital Commons where people may read the incredible work done by members of the Philosophical Society both past and present. The real stars of this year were our Executive team: Katie Wheeler (Vice-President), Eli Brown (Treasurer), V.L. Jackson (Creative Director), Emily Fritschie (Secretary), and B. J. Brannon (Communications Director). These amazing individuals worked tirelessly to keep this organization alive and I for one could not be prouder. You can read some of their work in this journal. I would like to thank our faculty advisor Dr. Don Viney, the Executive team, the membership, and all friends of the society for their unwavering love and support. Audrey Elmore is responsible for the latest version of the gorilla-looking-at-a-human-skull image which appears on the cover of this issue and that has been the emblem of the Society since its founding in 1987. To our readers: on behalf of the PSU Philosophical Society we hope you enjoy the papers presented here and that they may inspire you to dive into the wonderful world of philosophy. Thank you, and enjoy.

Right aligned,

Jackson Bertoncino – President



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# Western Kansas: Consequences of Misuse

Katrina Altenreid-Wheeler

Those who take a road trip through western Kansas only do so out of necessity, and usually take the Interstate to get the trip over as quickly as possible. Most of those individuals come up with the same assessment of the drive, boring. Western Kansas is a patchwork of large grain farms with the occasional small rural community. If one ventured off the interstate, to one of the minor highways that connect one town to another, they would notice another quality of western Kansas, a lack of people. Since 1960, population growth has steadily declined, and, at this time, most counties in western Kansas have fewer than ten people per square mile. With population declining so quickly, Kansas will probably lose a United States Representative if not in 2020, then in 2030.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cori Brown, “Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why,” The New Food Economy, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

Adam Smith, a Scottish Enlightenment Philosopher, wrote *Wealth of Nations*, the book that introduced modern capitalism. The theories and ideas Smith put into this book still greatly influence modern economic theory. Many modern business moguls and politicians point to Smith's work as a guide to building and sustaining a strong economy. While they look at the themes of *laissez-faire* capitalism and self-interest with excitement, often they miss Smith's warnings about trade restriction and going against the natural way in which to grow a community. Looking at the good without heeding the warnings has placed the rural communities of western Kansas in a population decline, which could end up affecting not just the economy of Kansas, but quite possibly affecting the economy of the world.

In *Wealth of Nations*, Smith explains how the economy might indeed be best handled, touching on subjects such as free markets, trade, and government involvement in business. Smith not only explains how to grow a thriving economy, he also warns society of practices that could be detrimental to the economy of a nation. The United States neglected much of Smith's instruction for several decades, the consequence of this neglect is rearing its ugly head. The dying of rural western Kansas is a prime example of the consequences of not heeding Smith's warnings. At this time, rural communities are not supporting the farmers that surround them, the government is not willing to invest in this region, and the new trade restrictions threaten the livelihood that was once a staple of life in western Kansas. Smith argues for the separation of government and

business, and he argues for making agriculture and production of raw materials the primary investment of a society, and finally, he argues against trade restrictions. Ignoring these instructions has placed the breadbasket of America in a bind. Applying all the theories in *Wealth of Nations* might just be the solution.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the entirety of the book, Smith consistently argues against the mixing of politics and business. This argument is for the benefit of both the business owner and society as a whole. The merchant is to look after his own self-interest, and the government is to look after the interest of society. Sometimes, the merchant has to make decisions like raising prices or trading with a foreign power that benefits their profit margin, and sometimes the government has to make decisions that benefit the nation, such as regulations on disposal of toxic waste or raising taxes.<sup>3</sup>

In 2012, then Governor of Kansas, Sam Brownback gave out tax cuts to large businesses throughout Kansas, causing a loss of seven hundred million dollars in revenue. This caused cutting in funding for education and other infrastructure as well as programs that assisted rural Kansans. Officially, Brownback claimed that this was an attempt to boost the economy, but it clearly backfired. It should, however, be noted that according to the website, [opensecrets.org](http://www.opensecrets.org), Brownback's largest campaign contributors were Koch Industries, AT&T, American Medical

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Jonathan Bennett: 2017), accessed December 4, 2018, [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776\\_1.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776_1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Association, Sprint Communications, and the American Institute of CPAs. There is no official evidence Brownback was trying to help those that helped him, but Smith would say this was business getting involved in government at a detriment to society.<sup>4</sup>

In book three of *Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues that investment in cultivating and improving the land will lead to the growth of communities, that the growth will, in turn, encourage investment back into the countryside, further improving and cultivating the land. Smith painted a picture of a symbiotic relationship between the farmer and the manufacturer. Smith also argued the cultivation of the land brought in others that would be of use to the farmer and assist in his efforts to produce the raw materials needed for production. These individuals would provide a need for others to sell items that can be of use to these trades' men, and soon a community has grown. He called this relationship and pattern of growth the natural way in which cities developed. He warned against putting too much investment into the manufacturing of raw materials, but he also stated that those raw materials needed the manufacturing and trade in order to be profitable. Without agriculture, the

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<sup>4</sup> Cori Brown Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why," The New Food Economy, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>. Jeremy Hobson, "As Trump Proposes Tax Cuts, Kansas Deals With Aftermath of Experiment," National Public Radio, last updated October 25, 2017, accessed: December 4, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/25/560040131/as-trump-proposes-tax-cuts-kansas-deals-with-aftermath-of-experiment>. "Sen. Sam Brownback-Kansas," Open Secrets.org, accessed: December 4, 2018, <https://www.opensecrets.org/members-of-congress/summary?cid=N00005244&cycle=Career>

manufacturing has no sustenance or raw materials, without manufacturing, the raw materials have no market.<sup>5</sup>

Western Kansas currently has much of the land cultivated into large farms producing grain as a raw material. The primary grain produced is wheat, ninety-five percent of which is Hard Red Winter wheat. Once was a time when farming was labor intensive, requiring several people to work and cultivate the land. This meant there was employment available as farm hands; this drew the population necessary to keep a community functioning. Now, with updated machinery, one person can do the job of three, and there are no local manufacturing facilities, therefore, there are few, if any, opportunities for employment, which means, in Smith's idea of self-interest, people are forced to leave their small communities in search of a means to financially support themselves. Fewer people means that the businesses, which sold services and products to not only farmers, but also other members of the community, have left as well—no customers, and no income. This loss of business and employment opportunities has caused even local farmers to sell their property and seek opportunities elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

As of this writing, Kansas ranks forty-sixth in the nation on net migration and, as more people leave and the population decreases, western

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<sup>5</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (Jonathan Bennett: 2017), 124-33, accessed: December 4, 2018 [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776\\_34.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776_34.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Cori Brown, Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why," *The New Food Economy*, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

Kansas is losing representation not only in the federal government, but in state government as well. Weak representation leaves western Kansans to figure out their troubles on their own. Their United States Representative, Congressman Roger Marshall, has said, “I believe communities can solve the problems better for themselves. I believe in American ingenuity and the American spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

The government focuses funding and attention on larger urban areas in eastern and central Kansas. In *Wealth of Nations*, Smith argues that growing the urban regions and not ensuring stability in the agricultural regions is unnatural, and the situation in western Kansas illustrates how devastating it can be. As of 2016, population growth in Kansas is at nine tenths of a percent, mostly in large urban areas. While some politicians remain optimistic, stating Kansans will farm for the next hundred years, the age of the farmer and of those leaving rural western Kansas seeking greater opportunities needs consideration.<sup>8</sup>

Book four of *Wealth of Nations* deals with trade with foreign nations. In this book, Smith argues for free trade with foreign powers without restrictions and government involvement. The theme of the separation of government and business is a constant theme in *Wealth of Nations*. The situation in western Kansas shows how allowing government to meddle in trade is a detriment to society. Smith also explains that supply and demand determine the price. If there is a high demand for a product

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

that is in short supply, then that product will get a higher price. Thus, if there is lower demand for a product in excessive supply, then the price of that product drops. There was a high demand for grain from Kansas; it was a primary export of the United States. Now, with trade relations changing, the exportation of wheat is changing too.<sup>9</sup>

President Donald Trump's trade policy unintentionally prohibited the exportation of wheat, and caused the price to drop, dramatically, thereby causing farming to be less lucrative. Again, with Smith's consistent theme of self-interest, it will be in a person's best interest to leave agriculture alone and try something else. If people give up farming, then there will be less produced, but it is uncertain how long before farming will once again become the source of income it once was.<sup>10</sup>

A proposed solution to farming once again being a lucrative business is organic farming. While wheat produced by normal means does require less labor and regulation, it comes with the bind of commodity pricing: what the market says it is worth, is what it is worth. The individual farmer decides the price of organic wheat, and can sell it for twenty-two

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<sup>9</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (Jonathan Bennett: 2017), accessed: December 4, 2018, 139-199, [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776\\_34.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776_34.pdf). Cori Brown, Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why," *The New Food Economy*, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (Jonathan Bennett: 2017), 139-89, accessed: December 4, 2018, [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776\\_34.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776_34.pdf). Cori Brown, Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why," *The New Food Economy*, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

dollars a bushel as opposed to the three dollars non-organic wheat is worth.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, all this industry and modern technology has caused yet another issue, over production. In 2016, commodity wheat prices fell to \$3.37 per bushel. In 2015, net income per farmer was \$8,451. Though there was an increase in 2016, it was still far below the \$130,000 farmers were accustomed to earning. Simply put, there is no money in farming wheat in western Kansas. Many families urge their children to seek better opportunities elsewhere; the largest group migrating out of western Kansas at this time is those between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine. This loss of youth will mean the loss of the “American ingenuity” that congressman Marshall was touting to save rural western Kansas.<sup>12</sup>

Since officially taking office in January 2017, President Trump slowly alienated foreign powers. He impeded diplomatic relations and ended or damaged trade relationships. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was one of the trade agreements he went after. In an attempt to “Make America great again,” Trump demanded a rewrite of the trade agreement, which Canada refused to sign. One less trading partner to take American grain meant less demand and the price dropped further. In 2018, Trump placed a tariff on steel imported from China,

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<sup>11</sup> Cori Brown, Rural Kansas is dying. I drove 1,800 miles to find out why,” The New Food Economy, Last updated April 26, 2018, Accessed November 28, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/rural-kansas-depopulation-commodity-agriculture/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

beginning a trade war, and adding yet another country that would not import American grain. To make amends, Trump said he would consider reentering the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), but then announced he would only consider trade agreements with individual nations. This was bad news for Kansas farmers, who rely on the exportation of their grain as a source of income.<sup>13</sup>

Most people call the midwestern United States the breadbasket of America. States like North Dakota, Montana, and Kansas, produce much of the grain consumed not only by the United States, but the world as a whole. Some even go as far as to say western Kansas, specifically, feeds the world. An interesting culture of rural life has developed around farming in western Kansas. With modern technology, the industrialization of agriculture, and the reemergence of nationalism in the United States, this way of life is dying. No longer do family farms pass on from one generation to another; parents urge their children to find better opportunities elsewhere, usually in the large population centers like Kansas City, Wichita and Topeka in central and eastern Kansas.<sup>14</sup>

Many economists, business people and even politicians, claim to fully know and understand Smith's ideas and claim they try to apply these ideas to the modern economy of the United States. However, a look at the situation in western Kansas shows, those who claim to understand Smith have missed something entirely and the consequences are being felt and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

will only continue to grow if Smith continues to be misinterpreted, ignored and not put into good use. This situation is no longer about making money, nor is it about the interest of a few farmers trying to make a living in the western region of a state no one cares about, and it is not just an issue to be considered at a future time. Failure to act soon will bring consequences which could be detrimental not just to life in Kansas, and not just to the economy of the United States. If depopulation in western Kansas reaches a certain point, valuable land could go uncultivated, and that could mean lower supplies of wheat, possibly too low. Kansas once fed the world. If there are no individuals interested in farming, who will feed the world then? Adam Smith would argue for more investment in agriculture, fewer trade restrictions, and a separation of government and business.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, (Jonathan Bennett: 2017), accessed: December 4, 2018, [http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776\\_1.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/smith1776_1.pdf).

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# Towards A Process Eschaton

B. J. Brannon

Death can cause one to act and believe in ways other than they would reasonably act: for instance, one man believed his tumor was a sign that his son's conservative political beliefs were justified only because the son must have inherited his father's pathological condition (Castano et al., 2011). Despite this fact, one study affirms that death anxiety, or fear related to the idea or thought of dying, actually decreases with age (Chopik, 2017). With death anxiety, however, those who exhibit debilitated health performance were more likely to turn to prayer, meditation, or other means (Ribbentrop et al., 2005). Alcorn et al. found that, of 68 interviewees, 78% of them felt religion and/or spirituality played a significant role in their cancer experience and of those people approximately 74% felt that managing their ailment through religious experience as a coping mechanism gave them hope for survival (2010). While the term *care* is multivalent, chaplains educated in spiritual and pastoral care operate in chiefly unique theological and psychological climates. Larry Kent Graham's *Prophetic Pastoral Caretaking: A Psychosystemic Approach to Symptomatology* postulates that spiritual counselors must function as those who discern, intervene, and resolve crises in relational-interpretational frameworks (n.d.). One context – process relational

theology – is one framework that can guide chaplains in their work. Yet it would appear that no studies have been conducted on process theological chaplaincy and its reception among those who look to religious care for aid. As such, this paper explores an attempt towards describing a possible process eschaton as influenced particularly by Charles Hartshorne, W. Norman Pittenger, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

### **Salient Points**

Rather than giving a comprehensive overview of process theism as did Cobb & Griffin (1976) and later Mesle (1993), I will give an introductory explication of several points that collectively spell out a process worldview on eschatology categorized by author.

#### **Hartshorne**

Charles Hartshorne wrote in *The Logic of Perfection* (1962) that rather than continuing life in some addition or subtraction of life's pleasures or pains, death is the cessation of life's possibilities. He posits that far too often classical theists have tried to combine sadistic traits with an all-loving God. This refers to people who think God wants to punish people for doing wrong with an eternity of suffering. Instead, Hartshorne holds that there are no "postmortem rewards" or punishments. According to him, the reward for one's actions exists during one's life. What it means to live beyond one's natural span of years is to secure a better future for others. This is more noble than merely living for self. Hartshorne uses Moses as an example of someone who brought his people closer to the promised land but did not regret not living there himself. Hartshorne also

notes that all things except God are “limited” in their life-spans and as such must reach the end of their limit, but not become destroyed - something cannot become nothing. He closes the section on “Time, Death, and Everlasting Life” with these words,

To live everlastingly, as God does, can scarcely be our privilege; but we may earn everlasting places as lives well lived within the one life that not only evermore will have been lived, but evermore and inexhaustibly will be lived in ever new ways” (Hartshorne, 1962, p. 262).

In *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (1984),

Hartshorne states that one’s life does not go from ‘something’ to ‘nothing’ (pp. 32-37). He uses a book as a metaphor for highlighting his line of thinking. In this metaphor, the book represents the “story” of one’s life. By way of explanation, he says that a book does not ‘become’ the silence, air, or blank page at the end of the book: the book is the total experience of the entire text from first to the last words. In *The Logic of Perfection*, Hartshorne likens God to a reader of these books, stating that “A book which is nor could be read is scarcely a book...” (1962, p. 251) and “... our adequate immortality can only be God’s omniscience of us. He to whom all hearts are open remains evermore open to any heart that ever has been apparent to Him” (1962, p. 252).

Hartshorne offers, as described above, three main ideas that are pertinent to objective immortality (hereafter OI) and distinct from each

other: (a) we are forever remembered by God, (b) we should not live only for ourselves, and (c) life's limitations are indeed natural for us. While this section explored a small array of Hartshorne's work, the goal is to highlight some important assumptions about OI that the rest of the paper utilizes.

## **Pittenger**

In direct response to those who feel as if questioning the resurrection is impossible, W. Norman Pittenger wrote the book, *After Death, Life in God* (1980) in which he follows a line of logic similar to Hartshorne that uses more Christian imagery, particularly the application of the idea of the resurrection. Pittenger writes in a similar fashion to Hartshorne that, "all that Jesus did and was, all that was effected in and through Jesus... all of these united in the inclusive reality, which is named when we use the phrase 'Jesus Christ our Lord'" (1980, p. 46). This language indicates that Pittenger felt similarly to Hartshorne that the creatures do not become nothing but live on in the memory of others and God. In addition, Pittenger states that for God to "remember" is to "make part of the Divine Reality" (1980, p. 47). Thus, he states that Jesus, "has contributed to furthering God's love and his activity in love, is continuously experienced by God, known to him, cherished by him, and used in the furthering of his objective," and that "it is precisely this which is 'raised from the dead'" (p. 47).

Pittenger also argued, in *The 'Last Things' in a Process Perspective*, (1970) that a personal wanting of life after death - or as Hartshorne called

it a “career” after death - is largely due to a “individualistic stress on the self” and that these people feel that, “*I* am what matters, *my* destiny is the important thing; if God does not preserve *me*, the universe is a mess and nothing is worthwhile” (1970, p. 80). This is to carefully contrast the process view against more classical views.

The point in this section is to highlight that this contribution to OI can capture the essence of many who proclaim it as an aspect of their philosophy. Pittenger was interested particularly in Hartshorne’s emphasis on living not merely for self and he extrapolated Hartshorne’s work on “lives well lived” through a biblical lens.

## **Teilhard**

In a paper on process theology and pastoral care, Robert Brizee writes in *So Then, Where is Hope Today?* (1989) about how people who focus “backwards” to historical or environmental statuses with such veneration that they seek to go back rather than learn from - or grow because of - tend to, “miss God’s continuous creative activity with the world” (p. 2). Rather than fixating hope on (a) an event in history, (b) identifying with a group or movement or organization, (c) that progress is guaranteed or (d) that humans are necessary for that progress, it is better instead to see hope as God’s persuasive and co-creative power continuing with responsive entities in the universe - to see the gift of choice and possibilities of each moment *as* hope.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, or Teilhard as he is known, aptly makes use of such an idea well before Brizee had written about it but in a

different way. The collection of some of Teilhard's essays called *Christianity and Evolution* (1974) includes an essay titled "A Sequel to the Problem of Human Origins: The Plurality of Inhabited Worlds." In it, Teilhard lays out his worldview on the possibility of life beyond Earth. Since Brizee mentions that God will continue to co-create responsively with the cockroaches surviving nuclear warfare even without humans, then Teilhard would urge one to consider how that applies to life outside of our galaxy.

In a string of propositions and if/then statements, Teilhard makes his argument that it is reasonable to believe that there exists in the cosmos clouds of "thinking stars" (1974, p. 229). Due to this, he challenges apologists to avoid thinking that Earth alone experiences original sin (p. 232) or that the Incarnation of Christ was located on Earth alone (p. 232) and finally that the Earth is the only planet with life on it "against all probability" (pp. 232-233). Finding each of these three ideas "absurd," "ridiculous," and "humiliating" respectively (p. 233) Teilhard also calls attention to those who would state that "mankinds" are a *certainty* are also presumptive, but that notions of other inhabited worlds should not and do not contradict faith in God (p. 234). If God's incarnation, resurrection, and love are truly universal, then they would extend beyond the confines of one small planet amongst millions of other "informed" planets (p. 234). The obvious message then becomes the following: process eschatology can allow for many worlds to become different collections of books in

God's library of memories. It does not exclude the possibility of other entities or worlds outside of Earth.

These points provided by Teilhard serve to illuminate a process perspective on life beyond Earth. While he certainly did believe in some continuation of "life" after death, his contribution to the intertwining of science and philosophy helps to better inform one who seeks to combine process eschatology with modern scientific advancements. Recognizing that life beyond Earth is probable has many implications for one's theology. As such, it is necessary to include a possible process perspective on the matter.

### **Conclusion**

In exploring some important contributions to a particular vein of process eschatology, another option is afforded to readers who doubt classical theism and its views on 'the end of things.' Hartshorne equipped readers with an analogy to understand his concept that would later be used by Pittenger to apply to the resurrection, and Teilhard extended the question of immortality beyond Earth's boundaries. The ideas of these thinkers, collectively, grant freedom to those wishing to escape from the mental gymnastics of classical views of eschatology. While there remain many sources to examine, this introduction covers some basic assumptions for an introductory, working-eschatology founded on the unique contributions of process thinkers throughout recent history. A quote from Pittenger, provided by Lyndon Harris in *The Living Church*, (1997) summarizes the case well: "And what after death has come? The

book of one's own life has had finis written on its last page; but in God there is no finis.”

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# Renewing Cancel Culture for a New Season

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In addition to the prevalence of vast misinformation on the internet, the age of information has ushered in forums, social media, blogs, and countless other sources that provide support for virtually any ideology. As a result, angry mobs of emotions armed with opinions and dubious facts become the poster image for how many view discourse and disagreements. This image is especially accurate for those concerned with the “cancel culture,” which is becoming an increasingly salient issue considering the internet's ability to proliferate opinions to such intense degrees. However, with a closer examination of some recent examples of cancel culture, in addition to a few examples of cancel culture being useful in its intended purpose, this phenomenon will be evaluated using a neutral definition of cancel culture in order to evaluate the purpose and usefulness of it as a persuasive tool in society.

## **Description of chosen emphasis area**

Various examples of cancel culture that both critique it and suggest its value can be examined to help determine the usage of canceling. Two closely related examples are the recent viral stories regarding changes made to the retail sale of certain Dr. Seuss books for supposed racism and the rebranding of the toy Mr. Potato Head to just Potato Head. In

addition to being an item of great controversy among online claims that the author and toy were being “canceled,” more mainstream news sources also perpetuated this claim about these cancellations, such as Fox News reporting on the issue, “more than 60 times during the March 2nd news cycle (Bump, 2021). That is a rather significant amount of stories to dedicate to these items, so it is safe to say that this was something Fox News viewed as a quite the threat and indicates the larger perception of what cancel culture is.

Despite the preponderance of negative coverage from conservative outlets like Fox News, it would not be fair to judge only those examples of cancel culture. Several times, it could be linked to positive outcomes or has been used by the same demographics who claim to dislike it. One example of this can be seen in the example of Harvey Weinstein and the mass publication and social media discussion about his crimes and deviant nature during the #MeToo movement (Shua, 2020). It is worth noting that Fox News, despite being one of the heaviest critics of cancel culture, was among the media voices who made an attempt to cancel Weinstein once his story became clear. In fact, Justin Peters (2017) reported that the intensity with which Fox News pursued and created coverage on the Weinstein scandal indicates that they covered the topic more than almost any other news source. This is not only somewhat ironic considering their hatred of cancel culture during other times, but also shows how natural it is to want to shut down a messenger that appears evil and yet, seems untouchable, even for a media outlet that already has a

presence. Another item that will be discussed in order to examine the fact that cancelling culture is a natural reaction of many is the recent controversy among Republican leaders calling for boycotts and impeachments of Republican House members who voted for the impeachment of former President Donald Trump (Gonyea, 2021). This collection of examples from various political sources causing a variety of different effects will lead to the conclusion that cancel culture is not unique to any group.

Social judgement theory and its primary concepts will be useful in examining some of the stipulations involving cancel culture that seemingly clash with the idea that cancel culture can be useful. These concepts, as described by Richard Perloff in his text *The Dynamics of Persuasion* (2017), are the latitudes of rejection, acceptance, and non-commitment (LOR, LOA, and LON respectively). Additionally, the ideas of assimilation and contrast as well as ego-involvement help explain why this reaction is so common for any demographic and thus why the proposed definition would be useful.

### **Explanation of research focus**

There is a serious dearth in terms of academic literature on cancel culture. One may notice that much of the previous provided examples of cancel culture and the following analysis relies much more on news sources and opinionated political pieces rather than periodicals or scientific journals; this is because much of the work on cancel culture exists in forms of critique on the subject rather than an attempt at

understanding it. Regardless of one's opinion on how cancel culture works and if it is good, bad, or impartial for society, a better understanding of cancel culture established using theories from the field of persuasion/attitude formation will be useful for facilitating a neutral discussion of cancel culture. As such, one of the intended outcomes of this research is to use social judgment theory to explain how cancel culture is not tied to any specific group, but is rather an aspect of communication that may be good or bad depending on the given situation or consequences of the "cancelling." Social judgement theory will also be used to explain why critiques against cancel culture can be so strong despite this claimed wide usage and normalcy. Such an evaluation will foster a neutral starting point for conversation on this topic instead of the assumption that this behavior is specific to a certain group or people and hopefully open the door to approaching this topic as an aspect of society with varying levels of nuance, rather than simply being a problem to be dealt with or worry about.

## **Analysis**

Cancel culture has been evaluated differently by different members of the public and by scholars, but a definition here will be provided and defended in order to provide the aforementioned discussion of cancel culture's neutrality. It will be described here as the following: *Cancel culture is a mass attempt at persuasion from a series of relatively less powerful individuals; its purpose is to convince the public that a person is not worth listening to or has an opinion*

*worthy of serious consideration due to the perceived ignorance or malevolence of that person's attitudes or beliefs.*

In her examination of the etymology of cancel culture, Meredith Clark (2020) describes how cancel culture essentially started as a term originally used on the internet to describe the public and social rejection of certain behavior on the internet, targeting those who may be otherwise seen as untouchable due to their position; Clark explains that, after being picked up by media outlets and politicians, it quickly became perceived as a threat to censorship and turned into an attack against minorities speaking out instead of a tool. This idea that cancel culture is more a tool rather than a threat is similarly founded in this analysis' view of cancel culture. But whereas Clark argues that cancel culture is related to a breakdown in the power of elites due to social media increasing the size of any platforms, this analysis will use social judgement theory to argue that cancel culture may be a natural part of the persuasive tools any group uses.

First, the negative evaluations of cancel culture that were mentioned as examples earlier should be brought under closer scrutiny. The stories of Dr. Seuss and Mr. Potato Head (Bump, 2021) being canceled that spread on many media stories rallying against cancel culture are, for one thing, stories entirely mistaken on these stories in the first place. Mr. Potato Head was not removed, altered, had a name change, or was otherwise "cancelled," by the hands of angry internet denizens. In a statement released by Hasbro (2021), the maker of Mr. Potato Head, it was clarified that the character was not changed, but the brand name of

the characters in that line was simply being changed. This makes complete sense considering the expansion of the brand and the inclusion of more characters in that line beyond the original. A similar story occurs with the cancelling of Dr. Seuss; the owners of the estate were at the helm of the decision to remove certain books from sale due to certain insensitive depictions, not at gunpoint of an angry set of sensitive people on the internet. (McCracken, 2021). However, in regard to both of these stories, news outlets were clearly quick to jump to the conclusion that this was a prime example of “cancel culture” going too far since something was being altered in a way that may have pleased a group opposing the news outlets reporting on it, revealing that there is somewhat negative bias against cancel culture from the very beginning of its critique.

If the definition of cancel culture is going to involve the idea that it is a tool used by the less powerful, then the fact that cancel culture is called out as dangerous by so many media outlets while rarely praised deserves explanation. Social judgement theory and its use of different latitudes can help explain what causes these negative stories to take such precedent. Cancel culture and those attempting to cancel something results from members of a group rallying against a message from a person they disagree with who is not really accessible, and this results in them using their outlet of the internet to convince others that this person’s message falls into their latitude of rejection. In turn, these news outlets reject the claims of the cancel culture, framing these stories as being attacks on free speech or democracy spurred by cancel culture in order to

push recipients of their message to accept that cancel culture is associated with negative movements and messages that instantly fall into the recipient's latitude of rejection, causing them to reject the idea. This idea might sound somewhat circular, and it absolutely is. In order to stop this movement, these news outlets in turn are using their own platform (the news stations) to attempt to cancel cancel culture. This same concept applies to the case of the GOP calling for the cancellation of other GOP members for voting to impeach Trump (Gonyea, 2021). The consideration of latitudes and the role they play in explaining why people use canceling reveals that it is a rather common tactic among news sources of even the groups most associated with critiquing it. In case one rejects the idea that these sources are mainly motivated by changing people's minds and attracting attention to their stories by using these framings, there exists evidence to the contrary, considering the change in behavior of Fox News with its heavy coverage (cancellation) of Weinstein after it became public knowledge (Peters, 2017).

Furthermore, social judgement theory can explain exactly why canceling something is such a commonly used persuasive tactic against members of a group that are deemed as bad actors. The concept of ego-involvement, as Perloff (2017) describes, is a core concept that social judgment theory uses to explain why people are quick to react with the same level of outrage to the "cancelling" of items as trivial as the changing of a name of a toy brand or as serious as the attention for a wealthy and socially powerful serial sexual rapist and abuser (Shua, 2020). Ego-

involvement describes the idea that people will care more deeply about a concept when it involves several of their values or beliefs. Thus, high ego-involved people have stricter latitudes and are much harder to persuade, meaning that, in order to convince these people that someone of (Weinstein) or something (The National Anthem) tied to several values of society, nationalism, freedom, or so on is negative, the pervasiveness of cancel culture is a natural response by those removed from that less powerful person. They attempt to associate that elite or otherwise untouchable item with negative values in order to help convince those with high ego-involvement that something should not be believed or encouraged.

This is a natural strategy for those less powerful in order to change the mind of those highly ego-involved people, especially when a group of considerably less power is facing a group with great cultural salience. The highly ego-involved people must be convinced that other key values are at risk in order to believe this item is similarly bad, and if they can be convinced of that, their latitudes will similarly narrow in regard to whatever value at stake is causing them to switch. As such, cancel culture is a natural tactic to use for groups fighting against symbols or people that seem to be untouchable by normal means, and it permeates persuasive tactics of those fighting against those with strong ego-involvement towards icons of culture that many do not want to change their mind on.

## **Conclusion:**

This investigation of cancel culture aims to point out the fact that it is by no means an isolated, new, or rare tactic of dangerous usage. Any use of cancel culture would be better understood as being a persuasive tool used by any group against something else as a means of changing opinions of the masses or the ego involved through associating that item with values that conflict with the message recipient's own beliefs. Any claim of the term being morally good, bad, useful, negative, is missing the point. Rather, it is simply a persuasive tool that will see more use as persuasive efforts continue. One does not evaluate a tool based on how good or bad a tool is, but on how useful it is for the given situation. This analysis does not claim to provide a prescriptive explanation of how to use cancel culture, but hopefully the understanding of cancel culture as an item that is useful based on how it is used and when studied will allow for further research into what the best uses of the tactic are.

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