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Honors 394 A

<center>Paper 1: Diary</center>

Lecture 1

The major ideas that stood out to me during this lecture revolved around the notion of what is "true" and how it relates to the way individuals have historically constructed their relationship to their society/the world. I think this is exemplified in the modern west with the growing division between the liberals and conservatives. This political "culture war" is signified by the differing adherence to notions of the "old" and the "new", which is invariably linked to differing constructions of what "truth" is. I tend to think of this differing construction of truth by looking at how they perceive reality through the dichotomy of "chaos vs. order". The traditionalist values on the right signify a greater adherence to order, while the liberal values on the left signify a greater adherence to chaos; both of which, when taken to extremes, are obviously destructive.

The fear I have is that this gulf between the old and the new will continue to perpetuate and pull people's political allegiances further and further towards the destructive, polar ends of order and chaos respectively. While the election of Donald Trump did signify a political victory for the right, the polarizing effect of the victory created an equal opposite effect as the left wing response has been divisive and pushed us away from potential reconciliation. I think it's really interesting to look at the differing ways in which the two sides view archaic, mythological traditions and how this relates to the way people are constructing purpose in their lives. To me, it looks like each side is trying to pull the rug out from the other, the end result of which would be potentially destructive instability.

I like the idea of *alethia* and how it describes truth as something that reveals itself to you, since it acknowledges that there is an unknowable component of "truth" that prevails within an abyss of non-comprehension. I think that is a big issue with the modern think, given there is a cynicism towards notions of "truth" that aren't immediately reinforced by objective fact based reasoning. I think it's a bit naïve to presume that we

can know how to act simply through the "objectively" defined facts of our existence. There seems to be a disregard towards wisdom based truth because it doesn't always present itself in a way that is immediately provable. This is well demonstrated in the "logical" man's absolutist critique of religion having no positive or functional purpose. Obviously the way people use religions to rationalize politically motivated ideological beliefs should be critiqued, but dismissing religion entirely expects that it's possible for people to easily adapt to a new, more chaotic form of existence that they are unlikely prepared to handle. This is especially the case since those who deconstruct religion do not replace it with anything substantive and expect religious folk to just leave their ordered and purposeful lives for something that, especially to them, appears unstructured and chaotic.

This is not to say "objective" truth and the truth of "wisdom" are necessarily dichotomous to one another. There are many cases where they help regulate each other and work together, but assuming you only need objective, quantitative facts to know how to live your life is not being mindful enough to the ever prevailing abyss of non-comprehension that results from the limitedness of individual perspective. People need structured guidance with how to live their lives and a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves; an emotional need that cannot be easily quantified. Getting back to appreciating the truth of wisdom and understanding how to re-attain that mindset seems, to me, to be what is necessary to bridge the gap between the diverging ideological parties. Instead of pushing the other to give up their entire sense of identity and belonging, it's much wiser to join together in the common ground.

Reading: Taylor, "What is a Social Imaginary?"

One thing that stood out to me while reading this is the idea that the social imaginary exists in a sort of balance between chaos and order. While it's described as being impossible to express because of its "very unlimited and indefinite nature", its function, at the same time, provides order and structure to inform individuals how to live and interact within their society. Given how unconscious the social imaginary is, does this point to humans having some sort of intuitive barometer of balance between order

and chaos? It's perhaps an impossible question to answer, but an interesting thing to ponder and might say something about the poignancy of culture and how each culture navigates our intuition through differing vessels; creating miscommunication between them and hard to bridge divergence. Undoubtedly, when differing social imaginaries are brought together, conflict, chaos, and instability results, threatening a given individual's constructed sense of purpose and belonging.

This is not always a negative thing, sometimes flaws in a given social imaginary can be exposed through interaction with another, but a sort of anxiety is sure to accompany it and, if this anxiety becomes too great, destructive consequences are sure to ensue. I think this is kind of exemplified in Taylor's discussion of practices and idealization. If a shift comes to fruition within a social imaginary that is compatible with both its practices and idealizations then the interaction is a largely seamless and productive one. However, if there is too much inconsistency and uncertainty between them, lots of conflict arises as seen with the French Revolution.

Reading: "Is Whale Rider a Comedy?"

This reading really integrates the early themes and new vocabulary for this class. One of the things that stood out to me was the idea that the shift of something becoming 'above the line' is dependent on some sort of conflict to initiate its ascension. Again the idea of balance between the new and old comes out. The traditionalist way of thinking almost acts as a filter to new information so only the best ideas get integrated into the social imaginary. I suppose it's a bit idealistic to assume that the traditionalist mindset is always going to act in such a productive way, because certainly it can slow the integration of productive change at times, but I think it does deserve its dues for keeping a lot of new bad ideas out. Without the old order resisting change, I think a lot of the more liberal type people forget that a great deal of chaos and unease would seep its way into the social imaginary if every new idea was automatically integrated.

I also like how this reading touches on the ideas of "self" and "truth" and how they converge. It's really important to recognize our own limited understanding of "self"

in order to remain open, yet skeptical to change. Understanding what you don't know is almost more important than recognizing what you do because it keeps you from being rash. The conflict of a comedic story, then, looks exactly at that conflict, a battle between the self and an emerging new known. The fact that a comedy resolves in a "joyful union" says a lot about how, if the process functions at its best, the two sides of the old and the new (or of order and chaos) are ultimately able to reconcile. It's uncompromisingly un-cynical which is something that I feel is lacking in a lot of modern discourse. It's also cool how the emerging truth is such an active agent in a story like this because, even though the characters aren't aware of it, it's always there and indirectly manifesting itself in the conflict at hand. You wonder how often that's happening in your own life without your awareness.

Reading: Junger, "Tribe"

"Introduction"

I wonder if Junger's wanting to be in a tribe so bad could be thought of as a deep desire to love. I know that might sound kind of corny, but the way I think of "love" is the ability to live through the things outside "you" (by "you" I guess I mean your consciousness). I think the way we tend to construct selfhood in modern society is very egocentric and relegates the "self" to an individual's own experience which tends to reduce love's meaning to its association to ego based attachment and affection, rather than something I would deem more "holistic" which would be to extend your notion of "self" to the other forms of experience that persist outside of "you."

Junger talks about wanting to have to prove himself to society so he would feel more connected and I think this is a longing a lot of people can relate to and I know it's something I relate to. It's interesting, though, that he describes longing for that connectedness by hitchhiking *alone* across the country. There's truth to that, though, since reflecting inwards can be a really great way to extend your understanding of others outwardly, especially when you start questioning how you've been orienting yourself with respect to other people your whole life.

The homeless guy at the end really connects everything back to my construction of love. I've heard it said that the depth of purpose in your life is reflected by the amount of responsibility you choose to accept and that's what that homeless guy does. He takes responsibility for the hitchhiking Junger, which makes you wonder, even if he's just "some homeless guy," he may be living a far more purposeful life than most.

"The Men and the Dogs"

I'm not certain of the authenticity of the claims Junger makes about natives and how Americans, especially men, would go and adopt native ways of life, but no natives ever reciprocated. Could be true, but something about his anecdotal and generalized style of argument leaves me skeptical. That being said, I get the point he's trying to make and think it's due to a communal imbalance within more urban societies; a feeling of not being quite whole in yourself because you don't feel whole within the social systems that you're existing in. The smaller communities of native tribes made it so each person had a clear role and responsibility and each person was integral to the survival of the next. They exist more as a communal organism than as property owning individuals.

I'm not sure I agree with his argument that the increased amount of work in the American society was an additional cause of this, mainly because I don't think people are opposed to work in itself, but the work a person does needs to be fulfilling, which is not always the case, especially if you feel on the outs from your community. The argument he makes about the natives never committing suicide was quite poignant, however, because I didn't realize it essentially didn't exist in hunting and gathering societies. It speaks to the how integral it is for us to feel like we belong.

"Calling Home from Mars"

Ultimately, modern society gives us lots of practical advantages and comfort, but struggles to provide us with concrete meaning. I think the more sprawled we become the harder it is to centralize individual purpose, but I'm curious to see if/how technological advances might be able to lessen the distance of the sprawl. You kind of see it manifesting itself on the internet through social media as people are able to come

together from different backgrounds and form a multitude of social niches. As much vain and shortsighted discourse there appears to be on the internet, I think it could also be a really useful tool for enriching empathy across cultures. Maybe that could help bridge the division?

I liked the bit about how litter is essentially a microcosm of how people feel like they aren't completely integrated into their society. As someone who would feel absolutely terrible and guilty for littering, I felt like I suddenly understood why the people who do it do it. That example hit home especially hard for me because it brought a new perspective on something that I see in my life every day.

Movie: *Whale Rider*

In the movie, the new known acting as *the* agent of reconciliation for the group was fascinating to me. This is seen through Pai showing her tribe that women can play roles previously prohibited by tradition and how, once she successfully does so, the tribe is given new energy and life. It's as if, since life is predicated on constant and indefinite change, it's completely necessary for traditions to change in order for them to sustain themselves. It's a convergence of apparent paradox, yet makes complete sense. And if that doesn't scream out the absolute necessity of balance, I don't know what does.

The grandpa and Pai were obvious symbols of the old and the new, but I really appreciated that, while they were in conflict, there was never a doubt that they had a deep love for one another. I think the deep, prevailing love is what ultimately makes the reconciliation possible at the end of the movie and something that is often absent in how we go about integrating large scale societal change. Perhaps this points to a greater efficiency of local governance over a large bodied central government, although the more factions of governance you create, the greater multitude of conflicting cultures and social imaginaries you have to contend with. Again this points to finding the ideal balance between them, but what this balance is, is far easier to speculate than to find and actualize.

Lecture 2

I appreciated the discussion talking about the discrepancy between mythos and ideology and how mythos are defined by their interpretive breadth while ideology is sort of a reductionist formula that has a clear cut answer. The power of ideologies over people seems to come from the promise of a clearly defined "truth" and a security within it. The problem of course is that these rigid ideas can never be perfect and will always wind up marginalizing some faction of society. It becomes even more tricky once people start to define themselves based on these ideologies because their entire sense of purpose and belonging become based in these ideas, which may work for them, but don't necessarily work for everyone. While it would be nice if people would stay open minded, it's inevitable that some people will become so certain in their beliefs and so scared of the consequences of their beliefs not being "true" that they will dilute themselves into believing in them regardless of evidence. That is the destructive power of order.

On the other hand, how effective can you establish a stable identity entirely through mythos? I could see it being more effective in cultures that are more isolate and contingent on a consistent social imaginary that didn't differentiate much between individual members, but, in a modern industrial society, there are so many different world perspectives you're coming into contact with that I'd imagine the spectrum of different interpretations of various mythos would undermine their capacity to unify. I'm not sure mythos on their own are enough without some consistent, basic, and underlying principles of value.

Reading: Barret Chapter 1 "The Advent of Existentialism"

Barret's critique of academic specialization and how philosophy has become subject to that resonated very strongly with me. I agree that a big part of nurturing a discourse of open mindedness comes from learning and looking at things from different perspectives. The way, then, academic philosophy has been marginalized by scientific thought really points to the marginalization of the truth of wisdom as a whole. The

seeking for the "objective" has taken us away from the practical. There's been an intellectual deprivation of the more abstract and intuitive ways we interact with and value things in our life. The consequence of such has created instability within the individual.

The main idea I got from this chapter was, "Where do we go now that God is dead?" By that, I suppose I think of it as how we go about conceptualizing the activity that resides "below the line," within the abyss of non-comprehension, that can point us towards wisdom by reintegrating the more abstract sides of human experience. It's this idea that the "objective" way of reasoning about life doesn't fully demonstrate "human truth," so the philosopher needs to go back to looking at the whole picture.

Reading: "Buffered and Porous Selves" / "The Great Disembedding"

While I really respect the porous self in its place within an "enchanted" world and can really relate to how this construction of self could integrate yourself more completely into your environment, I'm not sure I see the movement away from existing with spirits, demons, and other cosmic forces as a necessarily bad thing. The removal of that fear of existing with those things does bring with it a form of liberation, but I am in agreement that the buffered self carries with it negative and isolating consequences. The question becomes can you construct a sort of "porous" selfhood without the need to reintegrate the more "enchanted" qualities of previously porous people.

It is very possible to think about your "self" as being one with your environment which does embed you in a porous sense, at least intellectually, but actually connecting to the emotional sentiment of that, especially given modern culture, would take a lot of effort and rewiring. With a genuine belief in the cosmic forces, I'd imagine there would be an easier to conceptualize emotional avenue to connect your sense of self to the things outside of you, thus allowing you to be porous, but, without this genuine belief, being a genuinely porous individual becomes harder because you would essentially have to integrate yourself through faith in the abyss of non-comprehension (to be porous, but not replace the cosmic forces/imminent divine with anything). The modern

porous self would require a complete acceptance of your sense of self amongst the unknown and I'm not sure how possible it is to integrate your sense of self into something that is intrinsically unknowable. I think you can do it intellectually, but not necessarily emotionally. (Hopefully this made sense, it was hard for me to articulate this paragraph.)

Reading: Barrett Chapter 2: "The Encounter with Nothingness"

The fading of religion really touched on the sacredness of symbols being removed from everyday objects. The material world is losing itself towards a nihilistic cynicism in which everything represents a neutral or nothing value. Faith, then, is argued to be the bridge between reason and emotion in our social imaginaries. I think reading this really helped me fully understand the disintegration of the sacred into the profane in our secular world.

It is a bit ironic, though, that this shift follows with capitalism and our values being funneled more through external property and material goods. I guess material goods can have some sort of "sacredness" in so far as they represent status, but that seems a lot vainer and hallow than religious sacredness and pokes at an issue with how we framework our values. I also like the point he makes about modern lives being far more in the realm of the abstract and the inability to associate these abstractions with concrete feelings.

Lecture 3

The Real as something that hides behind the social imaginary and out of sight is something that resonated with me quite a bit. The social imaginary becomes an unspoken source of prevailing wisdom; guiding our sense of action and values within the Real, but, ultimately, it's not the Real, it's a construct. It then comes, with new information, that the social imaginary will show itself differently, but, as we have seen with how modern society has suppressed certain notions of the Real while revealing

others, not necessarily more all-encompassing. The Real will never reveal itself to us in its entirety, but it's up to our judgement to make the most out of what parts are presented to us.

I also think about something like ontological dizziness as chaos induced instability. Without a consistent sense of belonging or basic, common beliefs within a society, I think it makes sense that an individual may feel ungrounded. It becomes hard to have certainty that the way you are traversing the Real through your social imaginary is the "right" way. I think this fear can manifest itself in an anxious way, but I also think it can solidify a sense of rigidity within certain people. Instead of responding to the uncertainty in a way that manifests inner doubt, they ironically do the opposite and become more certain in their beliefs as a means to find security.

Reading: Barrett Chapter 4: "Hellenism and Hebraism"

Yet another constructed dichotomy, this time looking at "Hebraism" as valuing practice (doing) and "Hellenism" as valuing knowledge (knowing). Neither fully right nor wrong in themselves, but both lacking what the other has. You can't self-correct and adapt your moral practices without critically questioning the consequences of your practices, but you also can't know how to act merely through intellectual acquisition.

The Hebraic becomes an unquestioning naïve consequence, as such, but does have a clearly defined sense of morality. A system like this does allow for a greater sense of stability for the individual, but fails to accommodate those that challenges its order. In this mindset, you become very embedded in a concrete sense, while the Hellenistic traditions lived in the realm of the abstract and disassociated form of thought. The values then become predicated on the movement towards the transcendent, rather than the imminent, since it is ultimately searching to understand the universal.

Lecture 4

The equating of disembeddedness with "liberation" was interesting, especially since the transcendent form of the Real is not one that is entirely knowable, so how can you be "liberated" or seek the transcendent if you're disassociating yourself from it? It goes back to the scientific faith and how a lot of modern people believe that, through science, truth will reveal itself in its entirety and will be able to direct us in the best direction. But, even assuming that is possible, how does that help us in the present? It really signifies an incredible neurosis of being irrational and subject to any sort of delusional thinking.

The bit about how attempts to make everything sacred caused the sacred to collapse into the profane was also very hard hitting. When you try to force things on people and form a sense of intellectual order that is too rigid and deterministic, chaos and destruction result. You have to try and accept the differing ways in which people place themselves in society while also maintaining some sort of common ground and embeddedness. Much easier to say than to do.

The Matrix

Like *Whale Rider, The Matrix* is a comedy and looks at questioning the naïve consciousness. Neo is obviously feeling disembedded from his life within the Matrix, sensing that something is wrong. The movie seems to have little doubt that uncovering the true Real is more important than safely playing along in a delusional, fantasy driven social reality. It's interesting how, once he truly disassociates his sense of self from the Matrix, he's able to forego all the previously believed rules of reality. He becomes all powerful in his liberation, yet he doesn't want to remain there because it will forever symbolize an isolated existence to him.

I'm still uncertain about the morality of Morpheus's end goal to wake everyone up to the Real, though. It would literally destroy the lives of just about everyone still in the Matrix who are still living, what I'd imagine are, purposeful lives, but somehow, since their social imaginaries don't match his understanding of the Real, he subjugates their

experience as a lesser form of Being. I feel like there's a certain cynicism in that way of viewing experience; at a certain point you have to respect the role belief plays in a person's mode of existence even if the beliefs don't fully correlate with yours (or are, in some ways, delusional).

Lecture 5

We talked a lot about the role of the names in our group, which were things that I didn't think about while watching the movie. This is especially the case with Neo/Thomas Anderson/The One. "The One" carries with it obvious significance and Neo is the representative of the new, but the etymology of Thomas Anderson was surprisingly thoughtful. Thomas being an allusion to the Apostle Thomas-known as a doubting Thomas-and Ander meaning "manly" or "man."

It is interesting, also, that the Neo is the representation of bringing a new known "above the line," yet his story is a very traditional one given the movie is a comedy. It's as if sometimes you have to go back and retrieve certain modes of thought in order to progress and move forward.

Reading: *Roman de la Rose*

This was a super trippy read and I'm not sure I fully understood it, although it definitely made me look at the world differently. The images were so vivid and the way it described different psychological aspects-such as Hate and Cruelty-as being outside yourself was a really unfamiliar way to talk about these things. Since it's quite literally occurring in a dream world, there was a feeling that was imminent while I read it as if everything was occurring in someone's head.

I suppose my biggest take away was simply the ability to conceptualize yourself and reality in a way that is almost entirely non-literal. It really brings to light how our modern form of storytelling has really pushed away from metaphor towards concepts that are more literally founded our day to day. This whole reading was absolutely full of

metaphor and allegory, yet, at the same time, there remained a practical groundedness as it tried to express wisdom to the reader about love and how to remove yourself from your vices.

Reading: Barrett Chapter 5: "Christian Sources"

Because Christianity ultimately relies on its faith above reason, this chapter claims that Christianity is at odds with reason. This idea that faith is necessarily detached from reason is interesting, especially since, if the religions are believed to be the ultimate truth of the Real, wouldn't you expect reason to converge with the faith? Maybe that's why religion inevitably becomes absurd because it can't fully conceptualize what reason knows can't be known. It's a bit loopy to think about.

I don't see how reason strips the wisdom from the texts, however. It seems like you could use religion in accordance with your own discretion to integrate the metaphor into your social imaginary, but there's always the risk of it turning ideological. It also wouldn't really exist as "faith" in the same way they're talking about because it wouldn't be a faith in literal cosmic/transcendent entities, but faith in how to navigate the abyss of non-comprehension through myths.

The existence vs. essence and intellect vs. will dichotomies are where things get tricky trying to conceptualize. To me it seems these things are invariably intertwined and connected to one another, so the either/or debate becomes absurd. The *is* will be what it is and I don't know how exactly you can claim to have "will" over it nor can I see how you can claim to be something outside of your context dependent situation. Your essence *is* your existence and your will *is* your intellect or you could say that neither are anything at all. I'm not sure either is right or wrong, it has more to do with how you framework your sense of "self."

Lecture 6

The introduction of the dichotomous metaphor of the left and right brain was an interesting way to think about the differing mindsets we've been talking about for the past couple weeks. I think it's a model that is fairly easy to conceptualize as we talk about these ideas. The pre-axial societies were more right brained and, perhaps, not critical enough in the orientation of their thinking while the post-axial tends to do the opposite. As someone who can identify with more of a right brain orientated way of thinking, I think I can appreciate the need to rebalance.

I also liked how this was tied into the tension between the imminent and transcendent and how there's a shift towards recalibrating that dynamic to be more open towards the abstract, right brain way of thinking. It seems to come back to finding the right balance between the left and right in order to find the best way of traversing the Real through our social imaginaries.

The Tempest

I really appreciated how this play integrated the themes of the class. The different layers of reality were well represented, both in a literal sense and a metaphorical one. Each person's way of perceiving there reality seemed to correlate with their inner realities and said something about the kind of people they are. The scene where Gonzalo is talking about how lush the grass is and clean their clothes are while Antonio and Sebastian talk about how crazy he is really stood out to me in this respect. The way they were perceiving the world said more about them and their character than anything else, which I think is certainly true in how a real person orients themselves in the world. If you want to be cynical then the world can represent a nihilistic pit of suffering to you, but if you want to love then the world can represent just the opposite. Neither is really right or wrong in the objective sense of reality, but I think intuitively we understand the more productive and purposeful attitude to take.

Prospero's intense, controlling grip on reality also stood out to me. He reminded me of Neo in that way except his journey was sort of the reverse, instead of

transcending naïve consciousness to be able to manipulate the rules of reality, Prospero lets go of his need to construct an alternate reality to conform to his desires by forgiving and accepting the Real. I think we all do that in a sense, we let our judgements rule our way of viewing others and the world in order to rationalize a sort of truth to our feelings, but, at the end of the day, there always seems to be a longing and pull to what, deep down, we know is true.

Lecture 7

I loved how this lecture brought up the necessity of balance in such a direct way through the metaphor of the left and right brain. The Rose acts through as a very right brain and enchanted text, describing a hyper-reality. I think I gained a lot of clarity on what the allegorical functions of the Rose's images were. The idea of the garden as an ideal place of existence and how the vices being outside the wall spoke to what you need to let go of in order to transcend into this reality was really beautiful to me. I think there's a lot of wisdom to something like that, but we aren't really exposed to myths like this one in modern society.

Discovering that the Rose was essentially a love guide for young males back in the day also struck me. I can't even imagine a guy un-ironically claiming to read this in today's world, especially given how flowery its content can be. It also makes this such a practical source of literature, yet it's being told in such a non-literal way. I think we immediately associate allegory and metaphor with high art nowadays, but the Rose subverts that notion.