Best Student Essays
English

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

2014

English Best essays

1. Unfaithful Bodies
2. The Pastoral Symphony is a study in self-deception.
3. Comparing The Princess of Clèves with other "Virtuous" Heroines
4. Conman Bob
5. Do Public Opinion Polls Taint the Spirit of Democracy?
6. Fullness of Being
7. Child Behaviorism: Why Corporal Punishment Should Not be Used to Train Children
8. Can we solely blame women for staying in abusive relationships?
9. Secular Ethics

Title: Unfaithful Bodies

Student :Amna Memon

Instructor: Bilal Tanweer

Course :Writing Workshop

Code: : LITR 235

He is soft, like a child. I have to be careful not to press too hard or hold too tight, and I am constantly careful the way you have to be careful to not touch the soft spot on a baby's head. Everything has to be lukewarm, mellow, muffled. I bathe him with water that is close to the temperature of blood. I don't want to surprise his body with something too starkly different. My spine makes popping sounds and my blood rushes to my head and makes it pound painfully when I bend down to soap his feet, but I can still stand and he cannot which is why I'm the one sliding my soapy fingers between his toes even though he doesn't really go anywhere barefoot. He doesn't really go anywhere.

His skin feels thin like the yellowed paper in old books and I think that maybe if I scrub too hard I will scour it right off his bones. His bones feel oddly close to the surface of his body as if his blood and flesh have been compressed into thinner layers, the way layers of rock are under the surface of the earth. He looks like a wet cat sitting there on a chair under the shower – cold and scared looking with his hair all clumped together in places. I turn off the water and go to get a towel.

Sometimes I am asked why I don't hire a nurse. Nurses won't understand him like I do.

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We met at university. He was studying psychology and I was toiling through English. We made each other happy because we could at least construct a nice, sepia-toned image of a home in our minds if not of jobs and something is always better than drawing a blank. I started wearing lipstick and he bought a white dress shirt and we made a pretty picture with the one-foot

difference between our heights. My head came up to his chest and I could hear his heart beating when we hugged. We would sit together in silence and read books. We compared the chinks and crevices in our families. We built an impenetrable fort around heartbeats and shared books and common family problems and he told me how he missed his grandmother and I told him that my favourite flowers are frangipanis.

"Shaadi ke baarey mein kya khayaal hai?" he asked one day, as he rifled through a textbook, looking for a page of notes.

Silences weren't too uncomfortable with him, our parents knew about us and we had taken so many hours away from other things and given them to each other. Everything added up. We were about to graduate and I was soon going to be twenty six and too old.

"Bura khayaal nahi hai," I said.

Later, I wore my lipstick and he wore his dress shirt, we went out to dinner and he gave me a dozen red roses. Frangipanis don't come in bouquets, he told me.

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Our wedding was glorious. He was neatly boxed up in a black suit trimmed with a red tie that matched almost perfectly with the red of my lehnga. Shiny little silver sequins covered my clothes and threw off light, making grey spots dance on the side of his suit that faced me. I drew calibrated, appropriate breaths and I felt as if a rock was stuck at the top of the space between my lungs. A bead of sweat slid down the center of my straight back and I thought about the wet spot all those beads of sweat would make at the bottom of the back of my shirt.

"Piled on the makeup, haven't they," he said when I sat down next to him and gave me a half-smile and the kind of up-and-down look you would give your car after it has had a paint job.

 "I'll have so much to take off tonight," I said and tried not to let my teeth show as I smiled because brides don't have teeth, only lips.

The straps of my shoes dug into my feet and my toes felt sweaty so I tried to lift them off the satin soles of my shoes so that they wouldn't leave wet toe-prints, but my toes were strapped down as well. My mother told me I made a beautiful bride. She was right. The dents beneath my cheekbones had been coloured in darker and my lips were painted purple-red, the colour of deoxygenated blood in school textbooks, and my eyelashes were so long that they would have become squashed up against the lenses in my spectacles had I been wearing them.

He looked beautiful too, all angles and clean lines, with his neatly trimmed beard and neatly cut hair and squared shoulders and smile with his perfectly aligned grid of teeth.

"Idhar dekhiye," the photographer said, shining a light on our faces bright enough to light up a stadium.

We smiled. With our perfect hair and manufactured smiles, we were the picture the photographer would tape to the counter in his shop and show to people who wanted their wedding pictures taken.

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With the mathematical precision with which we were progressing, I became pregnant in the second year of our marriage. It was easy and peaceful and the only pain I felt was similar to the growing pains I had when I was twelve, a dull, not-too-unpleasant ache and a sense of something in me stretching outwards. I slowly became rounder, softer around the edges, with the angles of my hipbones and collarbones disappearing under flesh.

Sometimes discomfort would settle in but I would ignore it the way you ignore the little bit of blood you sometimes draw when you brush your teeth. We bought little blue clothes and blue woolen shoes and blue teddy bears for our son who would probably outgrow all those little clothes in less time than it would take for him to be born.

I took care of myself the way I would take care not to bang my knee against the side table when I got out of bed and he took care of me the way people who are afraid to pick up children worry about them from afar. We would sleep with a strip of empty bed sheet between us and I would wake up slowly and quietly during the night, careful not to wake him up.

One night I woke up with a jolt followed by the feeling of being frightened by a dream I didn't even remember. I had wet the bed. I swung my legs over the side of the bed and carefully lowered myself onto the floor. Warm wet lines came down my legs and I felt my face go hot in the dark. I turned on the light and walked to the bathroom and it was as I closed the bathroom door that I happened to glance at my feet and saw irregular lines on them that looked like rivers on a map except that they were a darkening red. I took off my clothes and saw clots forming on my wet legs and I may have gasped or screamed but all I remember from that night is muffled and coloured fluorescent white, like the light in the bathroom, and red. I washed off

the red in the shower and couldn't find a towel so I put clean clothes on my shower-wet body and walked back into the room.

He stirred as I opened the bathroom door and opened his eyes, squinting at me. A dark shape coloured the sheets where I was supposed to lie. I shivered in the cold of the fan and couldn't stop shivering and stared at the stain as if I wasn't sure how it got there. He looked at it, too, except that he seemed to know what it was while I wasn't even sure if I was awake.

He stripped the sheets and put them in a plastic bag which he put in the bin. He laid down a clean white sheet, fluorescent and unmarked.

"We should go to the hospital," he said.

"Soney dou mujhe. I need to sleep," I said. I was shivering and I drew the sheets around myself and tucked them under me and moved away when he tried to move close to me. I told him that I needed to sleep. He told me to suit myself.

Everything was white and clean in the morning and I wondered if I had had a bad dream. But the rock between my lungs seemed to have settled somewhere below my stomach and the maasi who cleaned our house looked at me with round eyes and arched eyebrows and offered to make me tea. The dustbin in our room was empty and the bathroom floor was a wet and unblemished white.

He came back late at night and had puffy crescents, pink and grey, under his eyes. I asked him where he had gone, especially after last night. He told me he needed to get out of the house and that he had had dinner from outside so I needn't worry.

I slowly started noticing the ridges of my collarbones pressing against my skin. The soft roundness was gone.

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There were more times when I would become aware of the rock between my lungs and then there were times when I felt the kind of comfortable you feel at dawn on a weekend in winters, when you wake up and know that you have hours more to sleep in the soft warmth of your blankets and you don't have to wake up until you wake up yourself. But then nobody ever does let you sleep that long.

Marriage and what comes with it causes a thinning of the boundaries that you carefully draw between yourself and your violation. Before, there are layers of clothes and rules. He had never heard my heart beating because his face would have been too close to my chest.

After, there are only thin, moist membranes that separate the body that you so arrogantly believe to be yours alone from everything that threatens to take ownership away from you. Suddenly, the difference in our heights was twelve inches too many and six and a half inches would leave me sore and unsure and filled with an uncomfortable heat and cold that was so cold it burned. The makeup on my dresser multiplied. I had different kinds for painting on over the blues and reds and all their shades that he would leave on my skin. But his antiseptic, aftershave smell would cling to me even after I showered.

My body had so easily, with one gush of fluid, cheated him out of a family. It refused to even try again. It was not me he hated, it was my treacherous body. I didn't know how to stop him and I

knew he still loved me and maybe this was him taking comfort in me in the only way he remembered. Time was kind to my body but it seemed to hate his so his body gave up on him. He stopped. Like a car without wheels standing on four bricks, he no longer went anywhere, not even behind my thin layers.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Outside the bathroom, I pass by the chest of drawers with the towels in it and pick up my mug of tea which has become cold in the time that I was bathing him. I turn on the television in the bedroom and sip my tea and close the windows against the winter evening. There are still twenty minutes to the hourly news so I turn off the television and hear my name being called in a faltering falsetto. I finish my tea and pick up a towel from the drawer and walk into the bathroom.

He looks at me with his muggy eyes and wheezes and water drips from the soggy clumps of his white hair. His fingers, which grip the handles of his chair, are a pale white and his lips are faintly blue.

"Kahaan thee? I'm cold."

"I know."

I wrap a towel around him and place his treacherous body in another chair.

Title: *The Pastoral Symphony* is a study in self-deception.

Discuss.

Student: Amina Raza

Instructor Dr:Naveed Rehan

Course Heroines:Through the ages the French novel from de Lafayette to Camus

Code LITR 2111

The Pastoral Symphony is an ironical novel, written as a book of criticism and one of it's

greatest criticisms seems to be the conduct of the Pastor, a character who is not only immoral,

inconsiderate and selfish but is also a harsh, judgmental hypocrite of a man. The Pastor's

continued inconsiderate behavior even in the face of the immorality and injustice of his actions is

the height of blindness and although Gertrude is the one who is physically blind, the Pastor's self deception leaves him as the one who is truly blind.

The first aspect of self deception in the novel arises from the Pastor's status as a pastor: A man of religion. The Pastor chooses to believe what he wants, in spite of being a Pastor, he believes in some parts of the Bible and conveniently avoids others, showing that even his faith is one of ignorance and convenience. Arthur E. Babcock asserts that "The pastor's dishonesty is to have performed a false reading of the testament" (Babcock 71). The Pastor in his diary, explicitly asks himself "It is diminishing, profaning the Gospel, to see in it above all a method for attaining the happy life" (Gide 53), illustrating how he consciously chooses to think only of verses that reflect on the innocence of love and not on verses that condemn adultery and sin. In spite of being a Pastor and being well aware of what Christianity thinks of adultery and fornication, the Pastor not only has an extra marital affair but sexually exploits a minor, and a blind girl at that, a girl who asks him "Then you admit our love is outside the laws of God" (Gide 62) and still fails to awaken any regret within him as he in response asks, "You think your love is wrong?" the "Your" instead of "our" allowing him to effectively disassociate with what is perceived to be wrong here. The worrisome truth is that the Pastor is knowledgeable of his despicable nature of his actions and it is assertions like the one mentioned above that makes one realize that his reluctance to realize that what he is doing goes against everything religion stands for is an act of active self deception.

Another aspect of the Pastor's self deception and hypocrisy is his anger over Jacques's affection for Gertrude, anger that he interprets as concern while it is in fact, jealousy. "I will not suffer you to speak to her, to touch her, to see her for one single day more"(Gide 39) are his exact words to Jacques, words that effectively illustrate that the Pastor's feelings for Gertrude are

in fact those of a lover and his reaction exhibits his jealousy over Jacques even touching Gertrude. Similarly, "Was it not in itself strange that she should accept instructions and guidance from him, when she had previously refused them from me, preferring she said, to practice by herself? I was more astonished, more pained than I liked to own" (Gide 37), the words "More pained than I liked to own" again showing his awareness of his feelings yet his insistence upon deceiving himself. The height of hypocrisy is shown when the Pastor says: "To abuse infirmity, innocence, candour!" (Gide 39) to Jacques when it is evident that Jacques feels genuine affection and love for Gertrude and wishes to marry her and enter into a legitimate and respectable relationship yet this is regarded as an abuse of innocence by the Pastor in contrast to his own extra marital adultery with the child.

The Pastor's self deception is not limited to the immorality of his affair with Gertrude, he is equally ignorant to the suffering of his wife and son because of him. In the beginning of the novel, readers are introduced to the Pastor's wife as a housewife with many children who has her hands full with work yet she dutifully does it. The Pastor brings a filthy stranger into the woman's home and after thrusting the vermin covered girl onto his wife, demands that he clean her. He is inconsiderate to the extra work he is creating for his already strained wife and in spite of her occasional complaints, he is aware of her dutiful nature and is not at all uncomfortable in abusing it for his own benefit. Even when the woman cleans the filthy girl, allows her to live in her house with her children and feeds and clothes her, her occasional, legitimate protests over the lack of attention the Pastor gives to his own children in comparison to Gertrude are met with comments such as "I most suffered from her reproaches" (Gide 23) showing the Pastor's willingness to cast himself as a poor victim of vindictive reproaches from his inconsiderate wife. Similarly, the Pastor is well aware of the genuine nature of Jacques's feelings for Gertrude but he

does not care at all about his son's feelings. He is well aware of his son's nature, the boy never required scolding or chastising from his father, and surely, the father's vehement exclamations that he stay away from Gertrude deter him from maintaining any notions of marrying her. This is another example of the Pastor's ignorance of another person's feelings in favor of his personal gain and his callous and cruel response to their suffering, a heart that is so cold to his own wife and his son, his flesh and blood, that it too seems blind.

The Pastor also fools himself with delusions of honor and duty when concerning his affair with Gertrude. "If I did not already love her, it would be my duty to love her for pity's sake ; to cease to love her would be to betray her; she needs my love." (Gide 64) is an example of the Pastor's opinion of his feelings for her and how important they are. The Pastor exploits Gertrude's pitiably condition and relishes her dependency on him. He enjoys creating a world for her when she only knows that which he tells her and teaches her about and in a way, he becomes her God. He fashions a world for Gertrude that is just as ignorant of reality as he is, later she regrets that he did not tell her of the sad and dismal realities of life. " There are a great many things-sad things assuredly0that I can't see, but you have no right to keep them from me." (Gide 61) Gertrude tells him, "The word is not as beautiful as you have made out" is her main complaint and the irony lies in the fact that the girl who is physically blind can still see reality in a way that the Pastor with his sight, years of experience and knowledge of religion chooses not to see and unlike him, she does not want to deceive herself. "We can't all be blind" (Gide 56) is what Amelie says to the Pastor, effectively highlighting how everyone cannot delude themselves to the extent that the Pastor has somehow managed to, complete with the idea that his love for Gertrude is pure, that he is protecting her from the harsh realities of life and that in doing all that he is doing, he is fulfilling some kind of duty he feels he owes her.

"Ironically, it is also the text that betrays him" claims critic in reference to the self deception in *The Pastoral Symphony* "for the self-conscious elements of his narrative reveal it as artifice. It has been shown that the pastor's claim of having understood himself only upon reading the first book cannot be accurate, since the first book contains references to a later understanding" (Babcock 70) again exposing another facet to the elaborate self deception that the Pastor participates in where his writing shows that he is conscious of his actions and it is in his active ignorance of them that he in incriminated because that is self deception; to know and to pretend to not know, or to choose to not acknowledge. The tragedy lies in the damage that his actions cause to others, for all his sins "the greatest sin of all, the one which caused the whole tragedy, is the lack of sincerity on the part of the pastor, who always lies to himself, refuses to see any eveil in his acts, justifies himself by quoting the scriptures and even to the end feels no need for repenting. It is the pastor's self-deceit which kills Gertrude in the end" (Parnell 70). It is then that readers understand the self deceit that pervades the novel and we understand the significance of the words "How happy men would be if they knew nothing of evil!" (Gide 22) because then they would not have to deceive themselves to such an extent in order to sin and not stir their conscience. It is then evident that *The Pastoral Symphony* is indeed a study in self deception, which is the central premise of the story: Blindness, physical and metaphorical.

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Title: Comparing *The Princess of Clèves* with other

"Virtuous" Heroines

Student Rohama Malik

Instructor Dr. Naveed Rehan

Course :   Heroines:Through the ages the French novel
from de Lafayette to Camus

Code: LITR: 2111

The Princess of Clèves, Red and Black, Dangerous Liaisons and *The Pastoral Symphony* have all dealt with women who became attracted to men who were not their husbands and, in the case of Gertrude from *The Pastoral Symphony,* their father figure. The characters of the Princess, Madame de Rênal, Madame de Tourvel and Gertrude are all hailed at numerous points in their respective novels as virtuous and largely noble women. Yet with the exception of the Princess all the other female characters indulge in affairs with the men they are attracted to when ironically it is the Princess herself who can legitimately conduct an affair or even get married to the Duke de Nemours at the end of *The Princess of Clèves* due to her husband's death. The Princess instead does not follow her heart's desire and remains single after the death of the Prince of Clèves and spends part of every year at a convent with the remainder of her life being furnished with "inimitable examples of virtue" (Lafayette 108). Her behavior and subsequent end are very different from the other characters listed above who all also come ultimately to grief. This difference is largely due to the nature of the Princess's character in comparison to the other women.

From the beginning of the novel the reader is made aware of the fact that Mademoiselle de Chartres is a "marvelous beauty" (Lafayette 8) who received all praise with a "noble modesty" (Lafayette 9). Her beauty is so striking that she soon has two suitors including Monsieur de Clèves who she eventually marries. Her marriage to him is one consisting of cordiality and respect amongst the partners. She realizes that the Prince has a "violent and restless passion" (Lafayette, 16) for her while she herself is accepting and appreciative of his love. However soon after her marriage she catches sight of the "handsomest man in the world" (Lafayette 5), the Duke de Nemours. The obvious attraction between the two then becomes the focus of the novel

as the Princess tries to quash her love for Nemours in her quest to remain faithful to her husband. Her attraction to the Duke is evident to her mother whose dying words include a warning to the Princess that she stands on the "edge of a precipice" (Lafayette 28) that could endanger the reputation the Princess possesses that Madame de Chartres so "ardently desired" (Lafayette 28) for her. The Princess's evident commitment to this reputation and to her own sense of duty and piety lead her to confess her attraction to Nemours to her husband in Part III of the novel, an almost unheard of confession for the time and one that critics still question the realism of. After the death of the Prince it would appear that it is again her sense of duty and honor and possibly even her own conception of being above other women who would "fall" (Lafayette 28) in such a situation that ultimately compels her to reject Nemours and his love. Added to these things are her ideas about the Duke's own personality and the fleeting nature of love after marriage. One of her main fears is "the fading of his love after marriage" (Lafayette 107) and all the "misery to which she would expose herself" (Lafayette 107) as a result of his waning affections. Thus the Princess shows a certain amount of maturity despite her young age where she not only has high regard for her duty to her husband, a duty she carries on even after his death, but she also has a good grasp of the nature of love in that society. Love in *The Princess of Clèves* "was always mixed with politics, and politics with love" (Lafayette 10) and this is a lesson that the Princess learns through finding out about various affairs at court. All these affairs serve as examples to her about how one's reputation is in the hands of others who can twist one's affections to get what they want, the most obvious example of this being the tussle between the Queen and the King's mistress, Madame de Valentinois. The Princess shows a high regard for her upbringing and character and learns from her surroundings and as a result of all this she decides not to give

in to the man she loves even when it becomes socially acceptable for her to do so, her sense of

duty and honor being so ingrained in her.

In contrast Madame de Rênal of *Red and Black* submits easily and quickly to Julien Sorel,

the novel's main character who initially strikes Madame de Rênal as a "little peasant" who

looked like a "girl in disguise" (Stendhal 21). Julien's description here is in direct contrast to that

of Monsieur de Rênal who is seen as boorish and crude. Madame de Rênal is soon seduced by

Julien but unlike the Princess of Clèves she is initially unaware of any wrongdoing on her part.

Stendhal establishes that Madame de Rênal forgot all that she had learned in the convent "but she

put nothing in its place" (Stendhal 29) and because of her considering Julien as little more than a

child she sees no problem in giving in to this young man who is completely unlike her husband

and shows a strange amount of passion and intelligence in his speech. Eventually however "an

instinct of virtue" is "terrified" (Stendhal 52) within her over her feelings for Julien and she

considers the word "adultery" (Stendhal 53) for the first time. This leads her to suffer as she

considers telling her husband the truth about her attraction to Julien. However she soon dismisses

this thought by remembering that a husband "after all is a master" (Stendhal 53) and hence she

backs out of telling him the truth. In addition to this, Madame de Rênal is a much simpler woman

than the Princess of Clèves and she does not possess the same sense of duty to herself or her

husband that the Princess does. She fails to see anything inherently wrong in her relations with

Julien in the beginning and even when she realizes that she is effectively committing adultery

she lacks the strength that the Princess has to break with Julien as she considers her life without

him as overall meaningless and thus she ultimately dies of grief after his death.

Similarly in Dangerous *Liaisons* Madame de Tourvel is hailed as an extremely virtuous

woman. It is in fact her virtue that leads Valmont to declare that he will seduce her to the point

that he will become the "god of her choice" (Laclos 34). Her piety and virtue are highlighted

throughout the novel even in Valmont's later letters where he calls her an "astonishing" (Laclos

296) "tender-hearted prude" (Laclos 299). She is also held in high esteem by other women such

as Madame de Rosemonde and Madame de Volanges who arranged Madame de Tourvel's

marriage. The allusions to her husband are restricted to the beginning of the novel and it is

obvious that though Madame de Tourvel holds him in high esteem she is not passionate about

him. In fact she initially sees love as a "dangerous derangement" which would cause "frightful

destruction" (Laclos 113) and uses this as a reason to keep Valmont at bay. Eventually however

she stops resiting Valmont and her behavior is studied by the Marquise de Merteuil who declares

that Madame de Tourvel has Valmont "by the lading-strings, like a child" (Laclos 179). It is this

statement by Merteuil that makes the reader doubt Madame de Tourvel's apparent innocence

towards love affairs. If Merteuil herself feels that Tourvel, a woman who she has considered

barely more than possessing a poor fashion sense, believes that Tourvel can lead Valmont on in

such a way then this just highlights a small, seemingly devious part of her character that was

nowhere to be found in the Princess of Clèves. Madame de Tourvel's inability to resist Valmont

who is a decidedly more wicked character than the Duke de Nemours just emphasizes a

weakness in her character that made her capitulate to one such as Valmont. Though she is

punished for her adultery it is through grief over Valmont breaking with her instead of any grief

over having deceived her husband that leads to her death, a telling difference between her

character and that of the Princess of Clèves.

     In André Gide's *The Pastoral Symphony* the young Gertrude also willingly enters into an

affair with the pastor who took her into his home when she was a child. Gertrude is blind and cannot see how old the pastor is however this does not allow the reader to ignore the fact that Gertrude is well aware that the pastor is married and that his wife Amélie is not happy about Gertrude being in the house from the day she arrived. Gertrude deliberately chooses to not see the pain she is causing Amélie and this is rather cruel on her part given how perceptive she is about life in general. Gertrude's character does not seem to be inherently corrupt though, her young age plays a part in her giving in to the pastor as does the fact that she primarily spends all her time with him, imagining him to be young and good looking like his son Jacques whom she eventually falls in love with. The pastor's own behavior is more to blame than Gertrude's, he being the adult in their relationship should have been more aware of the wrong things he was doing with her. In a way, Gertrude is probably the most similar to the Princes of Clèves in that she realizes that what she did was wrong and against her principles and so she repents before her death.

The Princess of Clèves is by far the most virtuous out of all these characters simply because her sense of honor and duty did not let her indulge in her feelings for Nemours. Although Madame de Rênal was largely unaware of any wrongdoing on her part in the beginning she eventually stops caring about any reproach she may inspire, overcome by her feelings for Julien. Madame de Tourvel starts out fearing love just as the Princess did but also gives in to Valmont while Merteuil's comment about her makes it seems as though she was simply using her fear as an excuse to both entice Valmont and keep him away. Finally Gertrude possessed some of the principles that the Princess did and once she saw the pain she had caused to those around her she allowed herself to die as a way to repent. Thus it would appear that the fear of love, her

sense of honor and the esteem she had for her own reputation all made sure that the Princess of

Clèves did not return the Duke de Nemours affections, and that while all these things were

present to an extent in the other heroines as mentioned above, the Princess remained the only one

to actually act on them thus allowing her to not give in to the man she loved.

Title: Conman Bob

 Student : RastiFarooq

Instructor: Bilal Tanweer

Course : Fiction Writing Workshop

Conman Bob

The name's Bob. But some folks also know me as Frank Pulley, Bill Butler, Gregor McGregor, Dr. Martin Stans and so on and so forth. I planned on livin' my life like a decent chap in our wee dirt-road town in Nashville,Tennessee. But then one day my Ma says to me, she says, "Bob, don't go runnin' after that Daisy. You a cobbler's son and unless the Lord think it fine to send us over some miracle, that's all you'll ever be."

Daisy was the prettiest girl in my school. Her Pop was the editor of the local gazette and her Ma had the prettiest linen and the freshest cakes, they said. My Pop was old, wrinkly and hunchbacked, and he was missing half his left index finger 'cuz he nailed it in to a heel once. The only linen my Ma had she used as curtains for the sitting room. So Daisy and I could never be. Another time my Ma caught me sewing a pair of ballet slippers for Daisy and she said to me, she said, "Bob, you ever try running after a lad on a cycle?

I said "No Ma, I never try doin' that."

So she says "Bob, if you try running after a lad on a cycle, sooner or later you gonna trip and fall. Even if you wearin' the best shoes. So just keep your head down and don't look around and stick to your shoes, Bob."

I'd've listened to my Ma 'cept I knew the ol' story about Mammy. Mammy was my old man's Ma, and all the while I was growin' up, all my folks would say, "Bob, you gone on your Mammy." She was the only lady in our town who'd ever spent time in prison. One fine day in the summer of 1817 when she'd been young, she decided to be more than just a poor man's poor

daughter. She stitched her some odd lookin' clothes and made up an odd sounding language and went about town till all the folks were beside themselves with wonder, trying to make head or tail of this exotic lookin' lady. She'd made a deal with her suitor, my Pappy, to act as her translator after which she'd give him her hand. So Pappy told the town folks, "this here lady's the princess of an island in the Indian Ocean and she got kidnapped by pirates and only just managed to escape by jumpin' in the Atlantic and swimmin' for life." The town folk couldn't get 'nuff of it. For a whole year, she fooled all the folks around her and got invited to all the fine houses with their fine feasts and their fine hosts and listened to their fine music and went ridin' with them on their fine horses to their estates and all the while she had a dandy ol' time.

So when my Ma told me I'd never be more than a cobbler's son, I told myself, I said, "Bob, the world 'dun seem to be made of folks any brighter than you. 'Fact, most seem dumb as shit. So what's the harm if you fool 'em just a little? If they fall in to the trap then they deserve it; it ain't your fault they didn't think to grab some of the smarts 'fore their mamapopped 'em out.

I'll tell you something though: I never started out crooked. Instead, I did what most lads my age did to prove some'n to themselves and their folks: I joined the army in '49, aged nineteen. It didn't take me much long to realize that being brave and fightin' fair and doin' good was like bein' gifted a brand new pair of black leather Bostonians which were a size shorter: when you'd wear 'em, folks'd praise you and you'd feel pretty darn good about yourself, but you'd have to bear a whole lot of pain to get there.

So when it happened the first time, we wasfightin' the Korean War, and I was in the trenches with a dozen other soldiers and a medic. One second the medic was bent over my leg

tryin' to stitch up a bullet graze wound, and the next second he was sprawled on the ground, brains blown out and all. I felt like I owed him a gesture of camaraderie so I reached over and yanked the dog tag from around his neck and flung it around mine.Casper Roberts, it said.Then the lot of us went back to emptying magazines at the enemy lines. Not much later on, a lad who looked like he was gonna shit his pants came slippin' and slidin' and stumblin' in to our trench and yelled in between gasps of breath that they needed the medic in the eastern trench STAT 'cuz one of the boys was shot. He waited for a second and when no medic leapt forward, he panicked and began flailin' his arms and beatin' the ground and cursing at us for not hearin' what he'd said. In the middle of his fit, he stopped dead and stared for moment at the medic's dog tag around my neck. Next thing I knew, I was being yanked out of my crouching position and being dragged face down along the mud, and then falling down on my ass in another trench, then hauled back up and tossed in front of a lad who looked like he was about to croak. Blood was coming out of where I figured'd be his liver. The dying boy looked at me and barely managed to choke out a "please". I looked at the lad and I said to myself "Bob, this boy here's gonna be goin' up to the Lord any minute so you might as well do him good in his last moments. Somebody to my right handed me a scalpel and I took it in my hand and flipped it over in my fingers a few times till I could get a good grip on it. I told myself, I said "Bob, this ain't much different than Ma cookin' her stuffed chicken roast. You remember how she does it; you've watched her plenty times. She just makes a wee slit, gets her hand in there and takes out all the stuff inside, and then stitches it back up. Just take a breath and do it like Ma does. And so I did and the poor lad lived till dawn and then died. But I got to do 'bout a dozen other surgeries: each time I'd cut 'em up, take somethin' out or stitch somethin' up, and then tell the other lads to give the poor chap a whole lot of penicillin.

The last surgery I did before the lot of us got flown back home was on a lad by the name of Bryan Fitch. A chunk of his right leg'd been blown off by shrapnel and I was patching it up and the whole time the lad was bawlin' like a baby. So I said to him, I said "why you cryin' yourself to death; we're all goin' home in a few days, and then you could buy yourself a prosthetic and you'd be able to walk around just fine". But he just wailed harder at that so I asked him again what the devil'd gotten in to him and he told me nothing could make him happy now 'cuz he had nothing to go back home to; his wife'd sent him a letter and she'd told him she 'dun love him no more and that she'd married the neighbor and they lived happily together in Fitch's home now, and then she'd comforted him by tellin' him even if he had no home no more, he could always walk in to mine and be blown up and then he'd be a martyr.

And then Fitch said something that got me thinkin'. He was blowin' his nose on the handkerchief I'd given him when he howled that he'd have gotten back to both the wife and the new chap if only he had an attorney. So I stopped for a moment and I said to myself, I said "Bob, this here is it; you been beatin' yourself all your life for being a cobbler's boy, and truth is, you ain't got big 'nuff balls to be shootin' guns and killin' folks. So why don't you try somethin' else? Whaddya say to attorney?

So I told Fitch when we was flyin' back home on the Boeing C-135that I'd been a lawyer for three years of my life 'fore I'd decided to serve a higher purpose and defend my country. I told him I'd get him back his house and his lass 'slong as he could drag his wife to court and sling some mud on her. Fitch agreed and the trial began. I confess with pride that it didn't take me very long to get the son of a gun new husband out of the picture. All I had to do was get some lads to burn any and all his identification documents, and forge a completely new set, which was then neatly put, along with the medic's dog tag I'd taken, back from where the originals had been

taken. I then got me a warrant from the judge, and had some state authorities run a background check on our Sun Of A Gun, and all of a sudden, Sun Of A Gun was being arrested on charges of "Desertion From Active Duty" as a medic while other brave souls had battled it out on Korean land. The now husband-less Wife Of Fitch found herself alone with nowhere to go 'cept for right back in to Fitch's arms, which is exactly where she went.

Fitch said he owed me his life and as much as he wanted to pay me handsomely for the service I'd done him, he didn't have the means to do it, and that all he could give me was his tailor's card. "Stanley's Stitching", it said, and I was supposed to go to this Stanley lad and get me a free custom-made suit stitched. So I decided to go to Stanley, but 'efore that I said to myself, I said, "Bob, look here now, 'stime to move on and graze somewhere else." So 'efore I stepped up to door of Stanley's Stitching, I got me a black wig, an Italian accent, a resume that said I'd worked with Salvatore Ferragamo, the famous Italian house of fashion for five years, and the name of Francesco Lorenzo for myself. On a fine Sunday mornin', Fransesco Lorenzo walked in to Stanley's Stitching, introduced himself to Stanley, gave the reference of Bryan Fitch and told him the Italian fashion houses had particularly sought out Mr, Stanley as their representative in the fashionably inept world of America. That lad Stanley gushed and reddened and spluttered like a fool, and then offered me to the post of Manager for his shop. I asked him what he was gonna be if I became Manager, and he bowed his head reverently and said he'd be honoured to serve as Assistant Manager. And that's 'bout how I got the fad for polka dotted men's suits goin' like a horny stud on a bitch.

But pretty soon, that lost its thrill and I realized I'd been playin' it too safe. So I decided on doin' something bigger and bolder. I'd walk the streets, tryin' to spot me some exciting new project but wherever I turned, I saw folks with trusting little useless faces. One such day, I

strolled in to a small book shop and picked up the first paperback I saw on the shelf. The cover said "Leo Tolstoy - Anna Kerenina". There was a man and a woman on it, and they seemed to be sharin' one of those romantic, gazin' in to each other's eyes moments. I flipped the book over and read the summary; there was some funny soundin' names on there. Under the summary, in big yellow print, it said "Pocket Books". And the office of Pocket Books is exactly where I found myself next with the same copy of Anna wachamacallum. In my custom-made suit, I demanded to be shown in to the Editor in Chief's office, and the pretty lass at the reception desk was quick 'bout makin' it happen. I walked in to Jack Goodman's office, flung the book on to his desk, and demanded how he, Jack Goodman, Editor in Chief of America's finest publishing house could allow such treason to go on under his very nose. The Goodman lad seemed to be tryin' to collect himself and size me up at the same time, and after a moment's pause he stammered: "P-Pardon me, sir?" So I let him have it: I told him, I said, "What treachery you partake by publishing books of those Russian bastards? For shame, sir! You sell yourself cheap to the enemy. What have you to say for yourself? Goodman indignantly retorted, "It's one of the finest books ever written, sir!" So I said to him, I said, "Finest?! Have you even bothered to read it? It lacks substance! The characters are lifeless! There's isn't an ounce's worth of profundity in it! If I had to write it, I'd write the whole goddamn thing in half the amount of pages, and make it even better! You're in deep waters sir; I'd say if you didn't hire someone with a better eye in the next hour, who knows what other felony your ineptitude may lead you to commit." John Goodman turned out to be a pretty decent fella to have as Co-Editor.

'Bout not too long ago, I decided it was 'bout time I write to my Ma and come clean and tell her I wasn't the sergeant battalion she thought I was and had been for the past year an' half. I wrote to her, I said "Ma, remember when I was a shoddy lass and you told me I'd never be much

else? Well, I'm gon' tell you just where all your son's been." So I told herand a few weeks later I got a letter in reply and my Ma'd said, "Bob, it says in the Bible, it says 'And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles', and this here what you tell me ain't nothing short of a miracle, I say, as the Lord is my witness."

I'd stick 'round and tell you about the time I was Carl Mathews, the child care specialist and Scott Moody, the sheriff's deputy, and Jones Dean, the civil engineer, and Dr. Peter Bedford, the cancer researcher, but my two 'o clock's waitin' on me: I got a baby to baptize.

Title: Do Public Opinion Polls Taint the Spirit of Democracy?

Student : Muhammad Junaid Aftab

Instructor :Rabia Nafees Shah

Course Writing & com

Code SS-100

[Type the document subtitle]

Public Opinion Polls Taint the Spirit of Democracy?

The modernization of the democratic society in the last century has revolutionized the nature of discourse and interaction between political workers and the voters. The introduction of electronic voting machines and the wide spread use of media during election campaigns by both the electorate and political parties has transformed the nature of voting behavior. The public opinion poll is another mechanism that has dramatically influenced the democratic institution. A public opinion poll is defined as "a type of survey…designed to measure the public's views regarding a particular topic…" ("What Is Public Opinion Polling and Why Is It Important?"). The first known public opinion poll was conducted in 1824 by *The Harrisburg Pennsylvania* in the run up to the U.S Presidential Elections. Since then, public opinion polls have been widely used to predict the outcome of elections. Although public opinion polls are usually considered to champion the tenets of democracy by informing the voters about policy issues, a close analysis of the principle shortcomings of public opinion polls in the context of certain general elections in western liberal democracies reveals that public opinion polls function in a way that runs counter to the spirit of democracy because they are rife with definitional problems, they do not take into account the different metrics of voters' preferences and they are wrongly utilized by political parties.

Public opinion polls cannot accurately measure public opinion due to their various shortcomings on definitional parameters. The definition of public opinion by people who conduct opinion polls – pollsters – is premised on the assumption that society is comprised of an undifferentiated mass of people who have the same knowledge base and interest in political

issues. This assumption is easily debunked by creating a principle distinction among the general population. ""The public…is made up of interest groups and a more detached and disinterested spectator-like body" (Blumer qtd. in Plowman 332). Plowman argues that it is the interested group, rather than the apathetic group, of individuals that asserts dominant control over public opinion (332). "Interest groups, which are backed by different power and prestige, [therefore] act through the available channels in the society, which means that they bring pressure to bear on those capable of making important decisions" (Plowman 332). Donsbach moreover argues that the public is composed of a number of sociological entities, ranging from pressure groups to people who have merely thought about contemporary political issues (20). In his opinion, "these varying conceptions [of public opinion] implicate a number of empirical phenomena – media use etc. – as criterial attributes [that opinion polls ignore]" (20). The direct effect of this misconception of the process of formation of public opinion is that pollsters give equal weight to all opinions, ignoring the aforementioned distinction that implies that every individual's preferences towards casting the ballot varies dramatically. This shortcoming manifests in opinion polls the form of a non-response bias. A non-response bias is said to influence the results derived from survey research if the response rate of the sampled population is low. A low response rate, skewed dramatically towaeds one side, is said to be one of the contributing factors that resulted in the debacle of *Literary Digest's* poll on the 1936 U.S Presidential Elections. *Literary Digest* distributed 10 million opinion ballots among a sample "…[that] was drawn primarily from automobile registration lists and telephone books" (Squire 126-127). "The magazine's final count before the election gave Landon 1,293,669 votes (55%) and Roosevelt 972,897 (41%)…The actual results on election day gave the [Democratic incumbent, Roosevelt,]…61% of the vote and his Republic challenger [Landon,] only 37%" (Squire 127). Gallup's 1937 post-

election survey on the poll's failure to forecast the correct result provides a possible explanation for this inconsistency. The result of Gallup's survey reported that: "69% of the people who voted for Roosevelt did not return the vote ballot; whereas only 48% of the people who voted for Landon did not return the vote ballot" (American Institute of Public Opinion qtd. in Squire 131). This discrepancy in the preference of people to return the ballot was one of the contributing factors in producing a "wildly erroneous forecast of the vote percentages" (Squire 131). Similar problems regarding the voters registering inconsistent results, in relation to the eventual vote they cast, with opinion poll interviewers continue to exist. Moon delineates two possible theoretical explanations to substantiate the claim that voters might have lied to the interviewers conducting polls, which might explain reasons opinion polls were not able to accurately predict the outcome of the 1992 British General Elections. In 1992, "all of the polls significantly underestimated the size of the Conservative [Party's] vote, and overestimated the Labour [Party's vote]" (Moon 106). The Conservative Party gained the vote of the 42.8% of the electorate, even though the various polls predicated it to gain only approximately 38% of the vote; whereas, the Labour Party gained the vote of the 35.2% of the electorate, even though the various polls predicated it to gain only approximately 40% of the vote (Moon 106 Table 21). Nick Moon mentions the hypotheses of 'spiral the silence' and 'cognitive dissonance' to answer the "profitable line of enquiry…: if people *were* lying [why] were they lying in the same direction [?]" (Moon 127). "The basis of the [spiral the silence] theory is that people who hold views perceived to be unpopular are often reluctant to express them…" (Moon 128). Moon argues that within the context of the 1992 British General Elections during which the provision of tax credit(s) and better public services, such as health, were central policy issues being raises prior to election day on May 3, voters – who would have preferred the Conservative Party's

policies that would have made them better off individually – might have felt guilty about choosing to ignore the collective benefit to society that Labour Party's election campaign promised (128). John Major, the Conservative Party's candidate for the seat of Prime Minister, was aware of "what might have been happening, for in one his…speeches in the final days…he actually told people that there was no reason for them to feel guilty about voting conservative" (Moon 128). Moon also makes use of the theory of cognitive dissonance to further advance his claim. "The theory has it that there is a tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e. beliefs)" (Moon 129). Moon argues that if the voters being interviewed were lying to the interviewers, they were in effect lying to themselves because they either genuinely desired the Conservative Party's financially beneficial tax policies or found it impossible to place the interests of the society above their own respective interests on election day – even when they knew that a vote for the Labour Party was the correct thing (128). Moon's assertions reduce the to essential claim that voters are prone to changing their opinions even till the penultimate day. This claim is further substantiated by advancing a principle distinction between the notion of an opinion and the intention to vote. "To ask how someone will vote is to ask, not for an opinion, but for an intention" (Plowman 337). Public opinion polls at best measure people's intention to tvote by asking them such questions as: 'Which party do you intend to vote for?' This question measures the intention of the voters by giving equal weight to the vote of the individuals, not to their opinions. Opinions, however, are incapable of being validated by opinion polls. "Many people, [for example] do not really have opinions at all on many issues, although some of these will still answer questions [when asked to be interviewed], perhaps in response to the pressure to have an opinion" (Plowman 339). These myriad of definitional problems, however, do not apply to a special form of an opinion poll: the exit poll. Exits polls are conducted on the election day

"in order to enable a media client to predict the result of an election a…few hours before the official result is known" (Moon 134) Exit polls share the distinct advantage of being a valuable source of information for the electorate. Moon argues that exit polls enjoy such crucial advantages over pre-election opinion polls as that of interviewing only those people who have voted – rendering void the notion of speculating the voters' choices – and that of timing (interviewing people after the elections) – eliminating the possibility of failing to account for any last-minute swing in voters' decisions (141-142). The multifarious definitional problems with public opinion polls, which do not apply to the special case of exit polls, render them an imperfect tool for accurately measuring public opinion and sentiment prior to election day.

Public opinion polls are not a true reflection of the preferences of the voters. The questionnaire of the public opinion polls is designed under the assumption that the voters are cognizant of policy issues that direct political debates. Questions 9 to 15 in a sample opinion survey conducted by the *Sunday Times* in 1997 asked the interviewee questions ranging from Britain's domestic policies – for example, which party has the best policy of improving the National Health Service (NHS) – and Britain's regional policies – for example, What do you feel about the disagreements of the Conservative Party on Europe? (Moon Figure 7). Opinion polls not only assume that the sampled population of the electorate is aware of policy issues but also implicitly imply that the electorate casts their votes solely on the basis of such issues. Although voters do take into account the stances of political parties on policy issues, they also cast their votes after taking other metrics into consideration. Although various polling organizations such as Gallup take into account public perception of political workers by regularly publishing the poll on approval ratings, they do not fully account for the myriad of voting preferences that influence voting behavior. Opinion polls, for example, are said to completely ignore the

dimension of personality politics. Social Psychologists have asserted that "individual personalities of voters…[have] become decisive for political choice" (Caprara et al. 2. The effect of personalities of individuals on voting behavior has been empirically verified by comparing the effects of personality traits and basic values. Personality traits of individuals are studied using the Five Factor Model that "provides a…quantifiable description of the main surface tendencies of personality" (Caprara et al. 6) that are classified into emotional stability, agreeableness, energy, conscientiousness and openness to experience; basic values are derived from "universal requirements of human condition: power….universalism etc." (Caprara et al. 7). The results of the experiment conducted by Caprara et al. concluded that the voters' voting decisions correlate with their personality traits. The Center-left coalition party in Italy (the country in which the experiment was conducted) in 2000, for example, "advocated social welfare, concern for justice, equality…such [an overarching] policy is most expressive of universalism values (emphasizing understanding, appreciation etc.)" (Caprara et al. 11). The trait of universalism indicated the highest correlation – of + 0.28 – indicating a strong positive correlation with the voting preferences of centre-left voters (Caprara et al. 17 Figure 2). Caprara et al. suggested a possible explanation for this phenomenon by asserting that the "political issues have become increasingly complex and politics units increasingly interdependent…" (2) as political parties now mainly occupy the center position on the political 'left-right' spectrum. Italy's context in which the experiment was conducted lends support to this claim. "The established order of Christian Democrats, Socialists and Communists collapsed in the 1990s after 40 years. Two main coalitions replaced them, center-left and center right" (Caprara et al. 9). "…Right and left in Italy have [now] lost most of their traditional ethos…[as] both coalitions champion the principles of liberal democracy" (Caprara et al. 9). The evolution of political discourse and political parties

has subsequently influenced voting patterns that are not accurately captured by the current construction of opinion polls.

Public opinion polls are thought to assume the role of an unbiased medium of communication that informs the otherwise uninformed voters. Opinion polls are presumed to encourage the voters to evaluate their personal opinions by providing them adequate information about the prevailing aggregate opinion. It could be argued, however, that rather than merely measuring public opinion and informing the voters about it, public opinions polls shape public opinion by influencing the voters to vote for a certain candidate. A major way public opinion polls are said to influence voters' choice is through the existence of the process of the Bandwagon Effect. The Bandwagon Effect is defined as "the phenomenon of a popular trend attracting even a greater popularity." In the context of the publication of opinion polls, the Bandwagon Effect is said to exist when the polls urge the voter to vote for the candidate shown to be leading in the electorate's opinion. The empirical evidence to support the claim is ambiguous as proponents of the different sides of the issue have produced analyzed empirical data to support their respective claims. George Gallup, founder of *Gallup*, attempted to debunk as early as 1940 the theory regarding the existence of a Bandwagon Effect. He asserted that if such an effect exists, "a substantial rise in the popularity of the winning candidate could logically be expected [after the publication of opinion polls]." Gallup and Rae analyzed the data from various US states to prove their claim. "In Kentucky, surveys were conducted over a period of four months…on the Barkley-Chandler campaign for the Democratic senatorial nomination" (Gallup and Rae 245). Gallup and Rae tabulate that the results showed that the approval rate for Barkley decreased from 67% to 59% between April 10 and August 5; whereas approval rate for Chandler increased from 33% to 41% between the same time period (245). "According to the

bandwagon theory, Senator Barkley should have continued to gain strength from the time of the first survey when he had the support of about two-thirds of the …voters" This trend, however, was not observed. On the contrary, recent analysis of data suggests the existence of the Bandwagon Effect. Skalaban concluded that after controlling for such variables as political interest and party identification, the outcome of the 1980 U.S Presidential Election was influenced by the Bandwagon Effect by increasing the voters' tendency to vote for Ronal Reagan by an average of 9.2% (147). Additionally, during the 1992 U.S. Presidential Election, an experiment conducted with college students revealed the existence of the same effect. Some students were given the results of student and national polls indicating that Bill Clinton was in the lead; whereas, other students were not exposed to the results of the polls. Several students who had previously intended to vote for George H. W. Bush changed their minds after seeing the poll results (Morwitz and Pluzinski 58-64). Although there is no conclusive evidence on the issue of the existence of the Bandwagon Effect, the analysis of poll data from different time periods provides evidence that undercuts the claim that public opinion polls tend to only inform the electorate.

Political parties rely too heavily on public opinion polls by using them as tool to help direct their strategies. Political parties conduct private polls to gauge public opinion regarding their campaigns. Political parties in liberal democracies have been conducting private polling for more than half a century. "Labour was the first British party to conduct private polling, with a survey conducted by Mark Adams in 1946" (Moon 174). Since 1946, political parties in Britain – and across the world – have been spending vast sums of money to conduct private polls. Kavanagh states that "in the 1992 general election the Conservatives spent £ 250,000 and Labour [spent] £ 200,000" (Moon 172). The purpose of private polls is for political parties to be able to

constantly remain cognizant of public opinion. Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, for example, used to opinion polls to attune their respective campaign strategies in the lead up to the 2012 U.S Presidential Elections. Given that the "…Pew Research Center, in its opinion poll [published a week prior to election day], said that Obama has edged Romney in the final days by holding a… 3 per cent lead over Romney…" ("Obama, Romney focus on swing states in final campaigning"), both candidates directed all their efforts in the last days to the ten different swing states – including Ohio – in "last minute efforts to break into each other's vote banks" ("Obama, Romney focus on swing states in final campaigning"). The function of opinion polls in the context of helping direct campaign strategy is beneficial. Political parties, however, rely heavily on opinion polls both before and after the elections. They have come to rely on public opinion polls to provide them an avenue for analyzing public opinion both before and after formulating public policies. The assumption behind this rationale is that the voters possess adequate knowledge to influence public policy via opinion polls. Margolis argues that the respondents of opinion polls are assumed to have perfect knowledge about public policy issues, making them better informed than those people who choose not to respond to opinion polls (64). Furthermore, if people aggregately express an opinion through polls, it does not necessarily imply that there exists a logical link between their opinion and their political behavioral manifestations. Opinion polls, as mentioned earlier, are able to accurately predict only the voters' intention to vote, which is captured by the "the closeness of the actual to the predicted election outcomes" (Margolis 65) published by, for instance, *Gallup*. It is more difficult, however, to demonstrate a link between "the expressed opinion on policies concerning…energy, environmental pollution…and subsequent political behavior" (Margolis 65). This lack in congruence between opinion and action is readily manifest in the form of negative populist sentiments against newly instituted

policies. In Nigeria, for example, despite the fact the a *Gallup* poll showed President Goodluck Jonathan to have an approval rating of 81% ("Rheault and Tortora"), Nigerians readily rioted against the government when a higher gasoline price was imposed. "Until…2011, gasoline prices in Nigeria averaged $1.70 a gallon…but cheap oil came at a heavy price: Nigeria was spending $8 billion a year to subsidize gasoline…. The IMF…agreed that cutting subsidies would be a vital first step towards fixing Nigeria's finances." (Agrawal). "It took [the president, however, only] sixteen days to cave. The government dropped prices way back down, to $2.27 a gallon from $3.50]" (Agrawal). This example explicitly portrays the degree of disparity between the expression opinion and subsequent political behavior, supporting that claim that political parties' over reliance on public opinion polls results in their inability to institute effective public policies.

Modern political thought emphasizes making the institution of democracy more participatory by encouraging more people to go the polling stations on election day to cast their votes. Public opinions are assumed to in part achieve objective as they seemingly provide information to the voters' about the aggregate public opinion. The public and political parties' manifest over reliance on public opinion polls, however, taints the spirit of democracy because the aforementioned democratic entities have come to over emphasize the ability of public opinion polls to predict the nature of political discourse prior to the elections with impeccable veracity. The effective result of the increased dependence on public opinion polls is that public opinion is delineated in a grossly erroneous manner that misrepresents the prevalent political mood and environment during the election campaigns.

Word Count: 3,074

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Note

After excluding the words to write the details preceding the essay, the in-text citations and the works cited list, the (main body of the) essay amounts to a total of approximately 3,074 words.

Title : Fullness of Being

Student : Maheen Rasheed

Instructor: Dr. Naveed Rehan

Course : Creative Nonfiction II

Code : LITR: 336

Fullness of Being

"Didn't this place used to be bigger?"

My question goes unanswered as my mother continues to haggle with the assistant over the price of the money plants. I look around at the local nursery I hadn't visited in over ten years, and which is the last stop on our shopping trip that day before going home.

The last time I had been here, the ferns and ficus had towered over me. I had walked down the raised mud path, making my way through rows and rows of flower beds, dodging bees and mosquitoes, and pushing away large cactus leaves from my path. I had looked up at the dark green sky above me, suffusing the area around me in a subdued shadow of mystery. Yet, I followed the mud paths round and round, gazing at the ants on the bark of a tree next to me here, plucking the feathery leaves of a fern there, following the path as it meandered its way back mysteriously to Mama when I had been sure I was lost. Hours, which felt like years, would pass in this wild jungle until I grew exhausted and annoyed. The insects buzzing had grown louder, the air had become heavier, and I was wiping sweat from my face repeatedly. I whined, as was my habit then, to Mama that I wanted to go home, that it was hot here, that I was getting a headache, and that I had seen all the plants twenty times now.

Mama's reply, if her work was not done, was always, "Not now, Maheen. *Bus*, five more minutes. Look around, I'm sure you missed something."

Scowling at Mama, I would turn around to retrace my steps down the path, turning left and right haphazardly. Racing around the foliage, I would nod at the plants as if I knew them intimately, making my way to my favourite flowers yet again, only to stop along the way to discover something new. Something I had not seen before during my excursions: a hole in the broad leaf of the ficus, a pink rose bed behind the empty pots. I stood still, my eyes and hands

absorbing this new phenomenon, till finally I realized that I had to walk down the same path again, adding these new details as I ticked off the checklist of plants in my mind one by one. I dragged by feet back to starting point, turned and started running. As my eyes darted from one plant to another, my head bobbing up and down in recognition as I passed them, I felt my throat getting more parched, the mosquito bites on my arms more itchy. I stopped panting, feeling dizzy now. But when I looked up, I couldn't make out where my mother was. I knew where I was, but where was Mama? I wanted to go home…

I look down at the petunias. The flower bed is tiny. The mud paths narrow. The plants which had once seemed so large are as tall as me. I look around, puzzled. I can see the boundaries of the nursery and the green canopy above me. I walked down one path, eager to discover what plant lay there. Pansies. A few vegetable patches. My feet stop. Dead end. I turn around, walk down the opposite side, cautiously finger the sharp edges of the cactus leaves, and stop. Another dead end. My mother is still looking at the money plants hanging together doubtfully. I decide to explore this nursery. It takes me only five minutes, walking.

Did Lilliput look like this to Gulliver[1]? Maybe then even Brobdingnag would look tiny to him if he went back a second time…

<div align="center">*</div>

In the monsoon season, my mother has her morning tea out on the porch. She would come inside to eat meals or watch the news, and then return outside. It might be raining with a light patter, or storming down with relentlessly, but my mother would stay outside, just looking.

When I would join her, I could see that her face is glowing.

"Isn't the smell just wonderful, Maheen?" she would ask, breathing in the smell of wet earth, deeply, greedily.

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[1] "Gulliver's Travels" by Jonathan Swift

"It's ok," I'd reply, "Nothing beats the smell of an old book."

"No, there's nothing like this. Everything is so clean when the big laundry machine is at work," she'd murmur happily, looking at her garden becoming greener with moisture.

I know what my mother is thinking. She feels closer to nature at this time, closer to God. No worldly problems can bother her now, she's just thankful for the peace of the moment. I look smugly at my mother and let her have her fun. I don't consider myself sentimental about nature.

But I can't deny that every time I see the familiar Central Park trees lining the road of Model Town on my way back home, my shoulders relax. The air itself becomes easier to breathe.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

While taking fiction writing classes in university, I realized that there's a story in each leaf. A shrub that you think you know by day looks differently at night. A tree stooping tree makes you think of the market, where shopkeepers hang their arms high above in order to display their wares on scales. Notice the leaf. Notice yourself noticing the leaf. Realize that anyone can experience a similar conundrum. Hence, in your next story, have the protagonist wonder how to precisely describe the green tint of the foliage in front of her.

Or look at the stars in the sky. This nocturnal activity takes you back to the time when you played in your grandmother's garden in Rawalpindi, when, in the midst of playing games with your cousins, you broke off at the sound of the *maghrib azaan* and looked upwards, waiting for stars to come out. You believe, even if it's fanciful and derivative, that all those grandparents you never knew because they died when you were too small are up there in the skies looking down at you. It's a comforting thought, one which you wonder if you can share in prose.

Or gawk at pictures of Africa your *phuppho* is showing the family in the living room. (She and her husband just went on their nth honeymoon). Maybe it's the high definition of your television screen that is connected to the camera—but how can such vivid purples and reds exist in the world? So that's why so many people go to Africa, you think (after all, safaris hold no allure for you). Catch your breath as you encounter a golden-red sunset reflected in the waters. Wasn't there a prison island in Africa? Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned? How can prisoners ever be unhappy when confronted with such an awe-inspiring sight? You feel a story coming on...

*

Ever since the trip to the nursery, I have been seized by nostalgia. It overwhelms me whenever I look at a tree or a plant. But what is more curious is that it overwhelms me when and where it has no business to do so: when the tree or plant I observe at my university for example has not played any role in my past whatsoever. What is it that I feel so nostalgic about then?

Before taking fiction writing class, my introduction to powerful nature writing was "Women in Love" by D. H. Lawrence. When I think about my childhood, nature was in the background. In fact, whenever I had encounter a passage about nature in one of the novels I had read growing up, I'd race across the words impatiently, never registering them except as a minor annoyance. But ever since I encountered the most provocative descriptions about nature that I have ever read in Lawrence, nature all around me has been pushed to the forefront. I want to rise to the challenge in the pages of those novels. I want to bring nature alive in my writing with a similar wealth of sensuous detail.

*

Often I feel a strange emptiness. Spiritual conflict doesn't consume me as it does others: I don't barrage myself with questions like "who am I", "where do I come from", "is there life after death", "what's the purpose of life" and such. I have a semi-concrete idea of who I am: an honest person who works hard, thinks a lot, is often lonely and puts her friends before herself. But do I care?

In truth, I'm horrified by how detached I am; from my surroundings, from my culture, from my native language, from my life. So mechanical my movements, so deliberate my walk—from the purposefully brisk to the leisurely slow. The way I plan every word I say before it leaves my tongue disgusts me—friends call me witty, but I can't help suspecting that I'm not.

Most of all though, I just think. I can be whoever I want to be then, most of all not-myself. I live out the pretend-daily routine of my favourite fictional characters, think in and address myself in third person, even dream dreams that don't include my presence. I always believed that I lived a more vibrant internal life than an external life, but does that life really include me?

"I think, therefore I am," according to Descartes[2]. But I don't feel like I am when I think. I lose myself in thought: I can slip into it noiselessly, following a pleasant line of thought as if I'm taking a stroll and enjoying the leisure of life, or I could churn the thoughts over and over in my head till they drum against my head with a loud beating, impossible to deafen. Either way, I'm asleep to the world. And isn't sleep commonly equated to death?

<p align="center">*</p>

There's another reason why I admire "Women in Love".

When Hermione strikes Birkin on the head with a lapis lazuli paper-weight, Birkin does not strike back but leaves the house and goes to the valley-side.[3] He then strips himself of his clothes

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[2] "Discourse on the Method" (1637).
[3] See chapter 8, "Breadalby".

and literally embraces nature with all its flowers and trees and grass. This may seem like the action of a madman, but after Hermione's stifling and mechanical intellectualism, nature represents a welcoming spontaneity to him. And nature here is portrayed as softer and more generous than any physical lover could be, possessing a healing power in its arborescence.

Descriptions of nature such as these make Lawrence more than just a modernist writer. Critics argue that Lawrence is one of the last of the Romantics: according to Kohler, Lawrence wanted a closer affinity between man and nature because nature "is the life-giver and the life-preserver... (and) becomes a part of the old instinctive life which civilization has almost destroyed"[4]. Thus, characters in Lawrence's novels experience moments of self-identification when they merge with nature around them.

However, pegging Lawrence down as a Romantic is also problematic, for while he did adhere to "the Romantic Naturphilnsophie… of an act of reintegration with the external world by means of which the individual spirit regains its lost integrity"[5], he despised Romantic anthropomorphism. Janik argues that while the Romantics did not advocate the exploitation of nature in their writing, the way they projected their own human feelings on the environment shows how they "looked upon it primarily in terms of its potential human utility"[6]. Lawrence, on the other hand, strove to describe nature in a way that its inherent other-ness from humanity became evident. Therefore nature in "Women in Love" is more than a backdrop; it's another protagonist, one which actively shapes human behavior while retaining its own fullness of being.[7]

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[4] Page 35.
[5] See Teets, page 2.
[6] Page 359.
[7] See Janik, page 363.

I wish I could fling myself down on the soft grass with an abandon similar to Birkin's, but I can't just yet.

*

In my garden, I find my past and present self collide.

There, in the corner, is the bird feeding area, where every afternoon dozens of grey pigeons and a single white one gather to peck at the ground. When I was little, there used to be a rock garden there. I remember Kelly, my first pet Alsatian dog, chasing me to that corner of the garden till I fell down on those sharp stones, grazing my hands and knees.

There's a false *mangosteen* plant against the neighbor's wall. Growing up, unaware that this was not a lemon tree, I delightedly picked its small yellow fruit from the branches. Peeling the fruit to reveal the soft yellow flesh inside, I'd suck on it and pull away every time, surprised to find that it was much more sour and tangy than any lemon could be.

Plucking at the leaves of plant which so fondly resembled a three-leaf clover in my childhood (I never could find the lucky four-leaf one), I make my way to the *gul-cheen* tree. This tree sheds large broad green leaves, but it's the flowers that fall to the ground that I used to collect long before. These flowers had five long white petals and a gold center. I'd twirl their stems around my fingers endlessly and place them in my hair. But I never knew that this tree had been dying many years back after facing several storms, and that it would have been uprooted had not my grandmother intervened. She looked after the tree herself, and after a few years it grew sturdy and strong.

Another tree, at the edge of the garden adjacent to the driveway, would have suffered a similar fate. This tree is at least a hundred years old, surviving since before the sub-continental partition. I didn't know that there had been a dispute within the family about it, that my family

members wanted to remove it but that my grandmother fought for its existence and vowed to nurture it. I had been too busy stomping the small spongy yellow fruits the tree would drop on the driveway, and struggling to reach the tips of the Bombay *bel* creepers hanging from its branches.

My mother tells me about my grandmother, about how she strived to keep these trees alive. But when I look at these trees and feel their barks, what my mother said just melts away into pleasing anecdotes, nothing more and nothing less. I cannot meet my grandmother again through these trees, much as I'd like to, because I can't get past the trees themselves. They've always been there in my childhood and yet I notice them in their fullness only now. They're not in the background anymore, but all that occupy my mind as I leave the driveway.

Acknowledgements

Title : Child Behaviorism: Why Corporal Punishment
Should Not be Used to Train Children

Student Muhammad Furqan Ahmad

Instructor Rabia Nafees Shah

Course Writing & com

Code SS-100

[Type the document subtitle]

Child Behaviorism: Why Corporal Punishment Should Not be Used to Train Children

Over the course of the 20th century, the world has seen a major shift in parenting practices, with later generation parents exerting less control on their children as compared to their parents and grandparents, who were observed to be far more "authoritarian" when it came to parenting (Littlewood 16). Furthermore, parents have been observed to become "more permissive" and have been seen to shy away from the use of "physical punishment" when it comes to rearing their children (Littlewood 18). However corporal punishment is still used very frequently today in child rearing – over 80 percent of the 40 million children who suffer from child abuse each year are subjected to corporal punishment in their homes ("Statistics"). When it comes to schools, there are over 1.5 million cases of physical abuse that surface in the United States alone (Greydanus 2).Although many parents support corporal punishment on the basis that it was used with them when they were children, that it may be the quickest and perhaps the most effective way to teach children what is right and what is wrong and that the adverse effects associated with it vary significantly across cultures, corporal punishment should not be used to train children because it may have lasting and damaging effects on their mental health, it may have adverse consequences on the parent-child relationship, because children may develop tolerance to it and that it may have detrimental effects on their cognitive development.

It is pertinent to elaborate upon two keywords here – corporal punishment and the age-group in consideration. The definition of corporal punishment, as used by Elizabeth Gershoff in her landmark meta-analysis of the correlation between corporal punishment and associated child behaviors is "the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior" (Gershoff 540).

Furthermore, corporal punishment must necessarily be "contingent" – the child must recognize a "cause and effect relationship" between "the infliction of pain" and why the child was made subject to this infliction (Vockell 278). The age group that will be considered is from 12 months to 16 years, to include all age groups considered in Gershoff's meta-analysis.

There is little doubt in the fact that the use of corporal punishment in the home or in the school setup can have damaging effects on the child's mental health. A study published in the Journal of Marriage and Family suggests a positive correlation between the frequency of administered corporal punishment and "psychological distress and depression" – even for low frequencies in children (Turner and Finkelhor 155).Murray Strauss, a leading figure in the field of child development explains this correlation - "Mental health problems are associated with physical punishment due to their being an outcome of the suppression of childhood anger associated with being hit by adults who children depend on for love and nurturance" (qtd. in Smith). Children who are repeatedly subjected to corporal punishment can go on to develop an unimaginable number of psychological illnesses. According to a report published in the TIME magazine, children who have suffered from corporal punishment are 1.4 times more susceptible to depression and anxiety and 1.5 times more likely to be involved in substance abuse when they grow older as compared to children who have been trained by alternative disciplinary measures (Rochman).Gershoff's meta-analysis supports this claim, with the results displaying consistently negative effect sizes for correlations between mental health and physical punishment in both childhood and adulthood (546-547). An important conclusion that can be inferred from this data is that physicaldiscipline often leads to the child leading a dysfunctional life as an adult – spanking even at the very basic level has, in essence, the potential to destroy the child's life, and thus should not be used.

Another reason why corporal punishment should not be used with children is because it has been known to negatively affect the parent-child relationship. As mentioned by Gershoff in her meta-analysis, "The painful nature of corporal punishment can evoke feelings of fear, anxiety and anger in children … these emotions can interfere with a positive parent-child relationship by inciting children to [fear] … and avoid … the parent" (Gershoff 542). Indeed, all thirteen of the studies that Gershoffanalyzed concerning the correlation between physical punishment and the quality of the parent child relationship showed undesirable associations (Gershoff 547). Even small acts of physical punishment can lead to deeply rooted negative views about their parents in the minds of the recipients. A nine year old participant of a recent study on the effects of corporal punishment claimed that as a result of being physically disciplined, she felt that her parents no longer loved her ("Review of Research on the Effects of Corporal Punishment" 18). Children rely on their parents or caregivers for a strong and effective parent-child relationship. According to Mary Ainsworth's hallmark "Strange Situation" experiment, children with secure attachment to their caregivers seek comfort and reassurance from them. These children tend to develop "stronger self-esteem and better self-reliance" as they age, leading to them leading to emotional stability in the long term (Cherry). The comparison is with children with insecure attachment, where children tend to avoid their caregivers. These children are far more likely to experience depression and anxiety, amongst other adversities as they grow up.Children who experience a poor relationship with their parents have an insecure attachment with them and following Ainsworth's model, they lead emotionally unstable lives as adults. This fact is substantiated by a longitudinal study involving 274 students in the United States aged 18 to 26 according to which students who were inflicted with corporal punishment in their early days were "more likely to have poor relationships with their parents, high family conflict, symptoms

of depression and poor social relationships at the time of the study ("Review of Research on the Effects of Corporal Punishment" 18, 19).

Parents in favor of corporal punishment often validate its use by claiming that it was inflicted on them when they were children and they turned out "fine". According to a recent study, on an average, four out of every five Americans who were subjected to corporal punishment in their childhood believe that it was – and thus still is – an effective disciplinary tactic (Turnbull and Ravenel). The question that arises is the operational definition of "fine" – who is to say what characteristics a "fine" adult possesses? At the end of the day, it depends upon the values of a society and therefore such terms cannot be universally defined. There is a general opinion amongst parents that one often hears – "kids nowadays get away with everything" (Lopez-Duran). Parents often attribute this decrease in compliance to the generally decreased use of physical punishment nowadays. However, this attribution has scientifically proven to be false – a recent study suggests that while children today are less compliant than children of earlier generations, "increases over time in conduct problems might have been greater had it not been for [an] observed [decrease] … in parental control …" (Lopez-Duran).

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that when parents today use the aforementioned argument, they fail to realize the fact that physical discipline was a global norm when they were children. Today, that is no longer the case. Over 29 countries have prohibited the use of corporal punishment in the homes (Lansford et al 2). Corporal punishment has now become an issue of global concern – the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the United Nations "defines physical violence (including corporal punishment) toward children as a breach of their rights under the CRC and has set a goal of putting 'an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as 'tradition' or disguised as 'discipline'" (Lansford

et al 2). Since it has been disregarded by an organization as important as the United Nations, corporal punishment no longer considered to be as effective a means of disciplining as it once was.

It is often argued that corporal punishment is the most effective way to teach children what is right from what is wrong. This applies specifically to preschool children, who are more likely to understand that something is wrong if they are "spanked" rather than if the caregiver tries to make them understand the same through logic and reason, because of their limited intellect (Turnbull and Ravenel). Gershoff's analysis supports this claim – the only consistent positive result of corporal punishment was found to be increased immediate compliance by the child (APA). This correlation was found to be consistently strong across all studies used in the meta-analysis. There are several problems with this claim. Firstly, although corporal punishment is highly effective with preschool children, there is a huge risk of rebellion when it comes to adolescents. According to a recent review, the correlation between corporal punishment and externalized aggression is much stronger in adolescents as compared to preschool children (Kandel). Secondly, the child may simply learn what is wrong, and stay unaware of what is right, thus nullifying the very purpose of the physical punishment. Furthermore, the child may resort to doing the wrong act or deed - for which he or she is usually spanked – in the absence of the caregiver, and would thus not effectively learn that a certain act is wrong. As far as corporal punishment being the most effective disciplinary tactic is concerned, Murray Strauss has the best answer, "Spanking is no more effective than other methods of correction and control, and it is therefore unnecessary to subject children to the risk of the harmful side effects (137)". To substantiate this, a study at Oklahoma State University assessing the correlation between different disciplinary tactics and the time respondents took to repeat certain misbehavior reported

that "all methods of discipline had a high short-term failure rate as measured by the number of hours until the child repeated [a certain] … misbehavior" (qtd. in Strauss 143). Therefore one cannot say that corporal punishment is the most effective disciplining strategy.

Proponents of corporal punishment often claim that since the adverse effects associated with it vary significantly across cultures, it is not necessarily a bad parenting strategy. An article on PubMed suggests "[a] positive correlation between the use of physical discipline … and disruptive disorders in children … in studies of European American families, [whereas] research on African American families has found a negative association or none at all" (Whaley). This is backed by another recent study, according to which, "physical discipline [is] … related to higher levels of … externalizing behaviors for European American adolescents but lower levels of externalizing behaviors for African American adolescents" (Dodge et al). Whether or not a child is shamed by the infliction of physical punishment greatly depends on the norms of the society he or she lives in. As reflected by these two studies, corporal punishment is far more dominant in African American societies as compared to European American societies. If children in every family of a society are subject to the same disciplinary treatment, they are far more likely to perceive that treatment or physical punishment in a positive light. On the other hand, if children are uniquely subjected to corporal punishment and their peers are not, such children are likely to experience an unhealthy degree of shame which would in turn have damaging effects on their self-esteem. The fact of the matter is that no significant positive outcomes of the use of corporal punishment have been observed, apart from increased compliance as reported in Gershoff's meta-analysis (APA). Recently, a study was carried outat Duke University headed by Jennifer Lansford whichanalyzed the correlation between the frequency of infliction of physical punitive measures and externalized childhood aggression. The study sample included participants from

six countries - China, India, Kenya, Thailand, Philippines and Italy. The results showed that corporal punishment was "related to … aggression … in all six countries, but the association … was strongest in countries where the use of corporal punishment was non-normative and weakest in countries where the use of corporal punishment was normative" (Lansford et al 4). The conclusion to be drawn here is that corporal punishment does not yield considerable positive results and therefore is not necessarily a good style of parenting.

Amongst the myriad undesirable consequences of corporal punishment, one of the worst is that children may develop tolerance to it. This would result in an increase in the frequency and severity of its infliction. The lines between corporal punishment and physical abuse would start to blur and before the caregiver would realize it, he or she would end up traumatizing the child. It is important here to operationally define physical abuse. Gershoff defines it as a set of "behaviors that risk injury", citing punching, kicking and burning as examples (Gershoff 540). The results of her meta-analysis identify increased physical abuse as having the strongest correlation with corporal punishment, of all the cohorts that were examined (APA). Jennifer Lansford's study supports this claim (Lansford et al 2). Increased physical abuse in turn has several negative consequences of its own, the most important of which is that the child may internalize aggression as the solution to all problems and may physically abuse his or her children and spousewhen he or she grows up, giving rise to a vicious cycle. As Richard Niolon points out in a comment on Gershoff's analysis, "spanking one's child may increase the risk of abuse for one's grandchildren"(Niolon). The only way to prevent such vicious cycles from coming into play is that alternative parenting strategies should be used.

On a more specific note, corporal punishment is known to have detrimental effects on the child's cognitive development. According to an article published in the Social Policy Journal of

New Zealand, non-physical means of discipline – for instance reasoning with the child – are stronger stimulants of the child's cognitive development as compared to "corporal punishment without induction" (Smith). The same article points out that the child would be very likely to develop anxiety against being punished and would thus not "explore"his or her "physical and social worlds" (Smith). The broader implications that follow are that the child's innovative skills and imagination – two essential factors contributing to his or her success as an adult – would experience limited growth, thus paving the way for a troublesome future for the child. According to a recent article published in a leading medical journal, neuroimaging studies suggest that corporal punishment may significantly reduce the volume of grey matter in the brain in areas associated with performance on a standard adult intelligence test (Durrant). The aforementioned claim is further substantiated by a recent study according to which an increase in the frequency of infliction of corporal punishment leads to a sharp decrease in cognitive ability scores for both preschool and school going children (Peschall and Strauss 26). This study furthermore asserts that parents may inflict physical punishment on children who seem to have retarded cognitive growth out of mere frustration. The authors of the study concluded a bidirectional relationship between corporal punishment and low cognitive ability (Peschall and Strauss 14). Such infliction only serves to further slow down the cognitive development process.The most visible proof of corporal punishment negatively affecting cognitive development appears when children start to go to school. According to researchers at the University of Toronto, children who study in punitive environments tend to have underdeveloped verbal intelligence and executive functions as compared to children who study in non-punitive environments (Nauert). A solid example of the aforementioned fact is the increasing prevalence of Educationally Induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in schools maintaining the use of physical means of discipline. This illness has

symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The causative factor in this disorder is corporal punishment inflicted upon students in schools (Greydanus 4).It is no wonder then that there is a unanimous agreement amongst psychologists that corporal punishment should be banned in all setups.

There is little doubt that the adverse consequences of physical punishment outweigh the positive outcomes of its use – if any – by a very large margin. Although parenting practices are gradually turning away from its use, corporal punishment is still a menace in many countries. Of the 1.5 million students that complain of physical punishment in the school environment each year in the United States, over twenty thousand require "medical treatment"in the following year (Greydanus 2). Measures must be taken to protect children from being physically violated in the name of discipline – strict laws against corporal punishment must be formulated and enforced, modeled on the anti-spanking ban imposed in Sweden in 1979. This ban produced remarkable results, as the "rates of youth involvement in crime, alcohol and drug use, rape, and suicide decreased in the period after the ban compared with the period before the ban" (qtd. inGershoff 564). Children are the future of any nation and considering all the aforementioned arguments, subjecting them to physical discipline is analogous to putting the future of the nation at risk. If a nation is to strive, exceed and excel, it must ban the infliction of the torture that is corporal punishment, on children.

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Title: Can we solely blame women for staying in abusive relationships

Student RiaPinjani

Instructor : Mahrukh Khan

Course : Writing and Communication

Code SS100

Can we solely blame women for staying in abusive relationships?

There is a possibility for all sorts of relationships to become abusive at some point in time. Unfortunately, this happens more than we would like to admit. This essay will focus on the abuse that women suffer at the hands of their partners. A large proportion of women that are victims of abuse continue to stay with their partners. There are a number of compelling reasons due to which women choose to stay with abusive partners. However they cannot be solely held responsible for this decision, instead it has more to do with the impact of abuse and flaws within our society. The scope of this essay is not restricted to a particular region, since that would largely limit the arguments to be discussed. Instead it will attempt to generate a deeper understanding of the issue to be discussed; 'Why women stay with controlling/ abusive men' by comparing cases across diverse societies.

It must be remembered that there is no specific set of traits that is associated to abusers. Even the healthiest looking relationships could be abusive in reality. Violence at home is often invisible and unidentifiable to other members of society.There are several types of abuse that a woman may undergo, these include; physical, psychological/emotional, sexual and financial. Physical abuse, commonly termed as domestic violence, can be of a varying degree. It can be just a single slap and it can go on to being so extreme that the partner kills his wife or girlfriend. Violence is always subjective, what may be a violent act for one may not be a violent act for another. Psychological/emotional abuse on the other hand is hard to define or measure quantitatively. It includes undermining an individual's sense of well-being. It usually consists of lowering a person's self-esteem, constant criticizing and isolating the victim from friends and

family(Welshwomensaid.org.uk, 2014).It is often the case that this kind of abuse remains undetected. Even if victims are aware of it, they underestimate the negative consequences associated with this type of abuse.Research indicates that emotional abuse can prove to be more devastating than physical abuse(Who.int, 2014).Financial abuse occurs when partners misuse their wives funds and assets or obtain control of their property and assets without their full consent. They may threaten, trick or blackmail their wives for money. Sexual abuse occurs when husbands or boyfriends force women to have sex, this is commonly known as martial rape. It also occurs when partners repeatedly use sexual insults towards their wives, force them to watch pornographic material or restrict their access to birth control (www.loveisrespect.org, 2014). This essay will mainly focus on physical and psychological/emotional abuse.

In 2011, *Glamour* conducted an online survey to analyze "the extent of relationship violence among young women." It was found out that nearly 60% of all young women have experienced some kind of abuse, 24% of these women have not told anyone that they have been harmed (*Glamour,* 2011).

A large number of women choose to stay with abusive husbands or boyfriends despite the abuse they suffer.This may seem horrific and sickening to many. One may wonder why these women choose this kind of life. The answer to this question is a highly complicated one. It would be unjust to solely blame the woman for staying.There are a number of external factors that contribute to the woman's decision.

Some women may find it hard to accept that they are being abused.They may feel that it is only a one-time thing and that it will not happen again. Abusers may make false promises that they are sorry and that it would not happen again.This is especially true during the initial

stages.Women may feel that the abusive behavior is temporary and they may wait for the 'happy days' when the abuser is nice to them. This may be because the woman remains nostalgic about the honeymoon phase or the good old days when everything was normal. Acknowledging the abuse is the first and perhaps the most important step for victims of abuse. When it comes to domestic violence, women may feel that it is a result of work pressure or some other type of stress and therefore it is justified. In some cases women may find abuse to be normal. This could be because they have grown up in families where this kind of abuse occurred frequently or because it is common in their society.

Abusive relationships are not necessarily abusive from the very start. Hence it often happens that partners have developed a sense of trust, love and understanding between them before the abuse starts. Women may find it hard to leave their partners just because they love them.As hard as it is to imagine, it must be remembered that love, even if it is abusive, can be intoxicating.They may be completely emotionally dependent on them and therefore they feel that they would not be able to live without their partners.They may worry that if they leave they will miss their partners and it will become hard to survive. They may also feel that they need to be there for their partners and that they should help their partners recover. In fact in some cases women truly believe that they can change their partners.

Another key issue is the acceptance of domestic violence is some societies. Some men and even women may feel that such abuse is justified in certain circumstances. UNICEF carried out a survey to examine the attitude of women towards domestic violence. It was found out that Ninety two percent of women in Afghanistan feel that men can hit or beat their wives if they argue with them, neglect their children, go out without informing them, burn the food or refuse to have sex. Sixty Three percent of Afghan women also feel that men are justified in hitting their

wives if they are not wearing 'appropriate' clothing. Fifty Four percent women in India, Thirty six percent women in Bangladesh and Twenty Three percent women in Nepal accept wife beating in certain situations. This attitude could be a result of the fact that a large number of women in these countries do not receive any kind of education (Clifton, 2012). However it would be wrong to say that only illiterate women accept violence against them or that such abuse is only prevalent in poor countries with low literacy levels. In fact 2100,000 American women are assaulted by men each year and four women die each day as a result of abuse (Statisticbrain.com, 2013).

However most of the time it is factors women have little or no control over due to which they continue to stay in abusive relationships.One of these is isolation; in some extreme cases victims are kept in completely isolated places, they are allowed minimal contact with family members and close friends. They are restricted to go to only certain places and abusers constantly check on their activities. This makes it hard for victims to escape even if they want to do so. They may also not be able to tell people that they are being harmed because of the isolation and hence they are unable to receive outside help.

In almost all societies certain cultural beliefs may prevent the victim from leaving.They may worry about what people would think of them and their partners if everyone found out about the abuse.In a large number of societies marriage and co-parenting is considered the norm and there is a stigma attached to single parents and divorcees. This is especially applicable in the Pakistani context, where marriage is given so much importance and divorce is largely discouraged due to religious and cultural beliefs.

Moreover, due to the prescribed gender roles in the Pakistani society, women are often restricted to the house and it is not considered 'appropriate' for them to work. Many times women do not receive higher education and get married at a very young age. When such women suffer abuse, it becomes even harder for them to leave due to economic dependence. They may not be qualified enough to get a decent job and hence support themselves and their children. If their families are not willing or cannot afford to provide any kind of financial support as well, then they may not leave because they worry about where to go and how to take care of their children.

Perhaps the most important factor due to which women are unable to leave is the effects of abuse.Domestic violence can cause severe physical injuries, however since these physical injuries are usually short lived, more significant in this context are the psychological effects on the victim.Abuse can cause long lasting effects on one's mental health."Increased anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression symptoms are commonly observed among survivors of domestic violence." In fact victims may even harm themselves by drinking excessive alcohol or taking excessive drugs in order to deal with the trauma they undergo.Abuse often ruins the victim's self-esteem; the victim may feel un-worthy and empty and hence may get involved in self-injurious activities.It also largely affects the victim's ability to trust others, they may feel unsecure and apprehensive (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2014).This is probably because they feel betrayed by their partners.As mentioned before, these effects are long lived, hence even if the abuse ends because the partner stops the torture or the victim escapes, the abuse can continue to haunt the victim throughout her life. Since the effects of abuse can take away victims' self-confidence, they may not be able to leave their partners as they become resigned and they may feel that they do not deserve better.

In some countries, the law may not protect victims of domestic violence.These include Uzbekistan, Yemen, Syria, Mali, Kenya, Lebanon and many more. Their governments feel that this is a private matter or may not treat it as a crime for some other reason.However recently there has been substantial progress in this matter, Saudi Arabia, which is known for violating women rights outlawed domestic violence in 2013(Alfred, 2014). The bigger challenge perhaps is not to make laws against domestic violence, but to implement these laws. It is extremely important to encourage women to report incidents of domestic abuse.In some cases women may be reluctant to go to the police because of the way they may treat them or because they don't trust the police to protect them. "Regardless of the severity and frequency of the beatings, most women refrain from reporting their husbands to the police for fear that they would be seen as committing a "shameful" or sinful act, or simply for fear of their husbands' vengeance"(Mansour, 2010).

Even though physical abuse against women is recognized as a crime in most countries, psychological abuse is not.Nicaragua is the only country where emotional abuse is recognized as a criminal activity.The law states that acts of violence do not only occur when physical scares are involved, they may also occur when psychological damages are involved (Packota, 2000). Psychological or emotional abuse is a wide term, therefore it is very hard to judge whether something someone says is actually abusive or if it is just rude. Such abuse often lacks sufficient evidence, hence family courts need to take special measures in order to investigate such cases and punish those that are guilty. There is also a need for shelters or organizations that help battered women. Such organizations do not only need to help such women recover but they also need to take appropriate measures such that women are able to reach them easily.

Another issue is that of the stigma that is attached to divorce.Since the only legal way these women can get rid of their husbands is by divorce, and it is so hard to get divorce in some societies, it becomes impossible for these women to leave. Women who are divorced are seen as 'outcasts' in some societies. This is true for Pakistan as well, it is very difficult for divorced women to re-marry as it is almost always assumed that there is something wrong with them or that they committed a shameful act by getting a divorce in the first place.For instance, In Egypt divorce and even khula is a rather unattainable option for women.While divorce is a financially exhaustive and an extensive legal process, khula requires the woman to relinquish her financially rights. Hence both of these options require the woman to be financially independent which is rarely the case in Egypt (Mansour, 2010).

Furthermore women may also be reluctant to leave abusive partners because they worry about the future of their children. As mentioned above, they may not be financially independent to support their children and they may fear that if they leave the children with the abuser, he may hurt them as well. As a matter of fact it is often the case that husbands who abuse their wives also abuse their children. Sixty Five percent of those that abuse their partner also physically or sexually abuse their children in the United States (Statisticbrain.com).

Nearly all societies are patriarchal in some form or another, women are abused in several ways outside, at work and also at home. The abuse is often justified by men and even women. This is largely a result of the way our society functions. Men are considered superior by many due to one reason or another and they tend to have control over many aspects of a woman's life. Despite feminist campaigns and efforts by many females as well as males around the world to end the abuse that women suffer every day, violence against them still exists. It is extremely important for women to realize that they do have options, that they can put an end to this life of

abuse and that they do deserve much better. This can only be achieved if all members of society take measures such that victims of abuse do not feel scared or ashamed to tell someone about what they are going through, these victims are appreciated for being brave enough to let go, they receive sufficient help to recover from their abusive past and law enforcement agencies make sure that abusers are punished for their acts.

Reported incidents of domestic violence are often horrifying, shocking and unspeakable. One cannot even imagine why any woman would continue to suffer from such brutality. Yet the reality remains that many women do live with abusive husbands or boyfriendsin spite of the abuse. Why they do so is largely due to a number of factors they have no control over. This is not to limit or undermine their agency, nor is it to justify their decision. It is only to remind us that these women are 'victims', hence they need all the support and help they can get. These women would only be able to put an end to their life of abuse when certain flaws in society are corrected and when they themselves feel empowered to get rid of their abusers.

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Title : Secular Ethics

Student : RomesaAsif Khan

Instructor : MahrukhSaeed Khan

Course : Writing and Communication

Code: SS 100

Secular Ethics

"The truth is that we need morality; the lie is that gods or governments can rationally define or justly enforce it."(Molyneux)

Secular Ethics is, summarily put, an atheist's or an agnostic's claim to humanity. It isa moral philosophy which holds that morality transcends the bounds of religions, and that the former may be comprehensively described as an objective phenomenon; equally applicable to all humans, irrespective of the particular system of religious beliefs they subscribe to- and also if they subscribe to none. It claims that morality is not the property of a particular religious institution; neither does it require faith in a certain Deity which enforces it.

This paper seeks to investigate into the question of the fundamental objectivity of morality. It approaches the question on two tiers: first, if ethics, also termed moral philosophy, can be secular; and second, whether they should be secular. Therefore, both, a theoretical approach and a normative approach, while exploring the secular theory of ethics shall be alternatively taken; which may ultimately allow the reader to formulate a conclusive opinion on the viability of this theory.However, this essay shall not seek to provide a refutation for the idea of religion itself, and not prove the claim of morality sustaining independently of God by attempting to nullify the concept of God existing in the first place. The rationality of religion is not the subject this essay aims to tackle- it simply seeks to argue that morality is not, essentially, a precept of religion; but is, more accurately, a precept of humanity.

The BBC Ethic's Guide describes: "At its simplest, ethics is a system of moral principles. They affect how people make decisions and lead their lives.Ethics is concerned with what is good for individuals and society-". This is, however, in itself a problematic definition of ethics if we are considering ethics to

always lie within the domain of religion, for it would necessarily entail that ethics becomes subjective to

each individual, pertaining to the particular religious creed they participate. This simply means that

moral standards are subject to change depending on *who* they apply to, creating problems that are

contrary to even intuitive and elementary moral notionssuch as fairness. It gives rise to some gray areas

within morality and its subset of justice, for example permitting instances such as religious legal

exceptions.

As is aptly pointed out by Dr. Sohail, it is "also important to point out that moralities of different

religions are not only different, they are also contradictory. Sin of one religion is virtue in the other.

Followers of different religions and sects have conflicting and contradictory interpretations of the same

scriptures and divine revelations." Therefore, ethical principles rooted in religion are deprived of any

absolute standard criterion, which is not contingent on particular situations and particular men to which

it applies, and thus, by virtue of its uniformity carries the force of moral law. Here it may be argued that

Secular ethics itself also cannot be aligned with moral absolutism since 'Moral absolutism emerges from

a theistic worldview' (Adarkwa); which goes to negate the inherent meaning of secularism. However,

that appears to be merely an issue of the semantics of 'moral absolutism'; for religious or theistic

philosophies cannot really give birth to any morality which is absolute in nature, by virtue of the the very

diversity that is found among and within these religions. Moreover, this diversity also means that, since

all religious persons' claims are equally valid, these claims, more often than not, tend to nullify each

other. As no religiously derived moral rule can take precedence over another, and to which the decision

can be deferred to in case of disputes between men, society would disintegrate into anarchy. Venerated

Tibetan Buddhist leader, the 14th Dalai Lama summarizes this need of human societies to refer to a more

objective form of ethics, suggesting that "in today's secular world, religion alone is no longer adequate

as a basis for ethics... any religion-based answer to the problem of our neglect of inner values can never

be universal, and so will be inadequate. What we need today is an approach to ethics which makes no

recourse to religion and can be equally acceptable to those with faith and those without: a secular ethics."(qtd. in Rocha)

Thus having established a need for secular ethics, discussing its normative aspect as promised above, it is essential to now also step down to the first tier of the question- that is to begin developing a theoretical basis for this ethical theory. However, before positing the principles on which such an objective moral theory can be based, it is deemed necessary to first define exactly what one can expect it to mean: Objective morality is morality that is "not dependent on the mind for existence", according to the New Oxford American Dictionary; that is such morality sustains through all space and time, and religions and cultures- it is *universal,* and exists independently of if and how its subjects exist. The moral rules which characterize this form of moral philosophy then may be aptly summarized as " set of rules claiming to accurately and consistently identify universally preferable human behaviours, just as *physics* is a set of rules claiming to accurately and consistently identify the universal behaviour of matter."Molyneux).Such 'universally preferable behavior' is grounded in the fundamental argument of secular theorists "that human beings, through the innate human capacities for empathy and compassion, are capable of determining ethical conduct in life; that through the use of logic and reason, humans are capable of deriving normative principles of behavior; that humans have a moral responsibility to ensure that societies and individuals act in accordance with these ethical principles; and that societies should "advance" from less ethical and just to more ethical and just forms."(Rocha) Therefore, the appeal of the secular theorists is, fundamentally, to a very simple notion, shared instinctively by all humanity: compassion; further divided into two categories by the Dalai Lama: The first is the "biological level", by which he refers to the sorts of instinctual nurturing behaviors that mammals tend to demonstrate towards their offspring, close kin, and social groups. The second is "an extended level, which has to be deliberately cultivated." (Rocha). This division of 'compassion', where objective morality can be argued to stem from, is akin to the division of ethics into 'instinctive ethics',

and 'rational ethics'- where the former is an inherent sense of morality, or compassion; the latter being "acquired by practice and habituation.", as suggested by Aristotle, in his Nicomachean Ethics theory.(Rocha)

Having acknowledged that Secular Ethics *can* be grounded in universally held notions such as empathy and compassion; it is necessary, again, to appreciate why such 'universally preferable behavior' is *requisite.* A universally acceptable code of conduct is, as discussed above, needed to prevent anarchy and chaos, and to allow humans to reach common ground on issues- and for the latter to be possible, they must share a common language for negotiation: the *moral language* of universally preferable behavior. It is argued, in a less formal, but nonetheless interesting,manner by Stefan Molyneux, in his book ,*Universally Preferable Behaviour-A Rational Proof of Secular Ethics*: "I cannot submit a scientific paper written in my own personal language, claiming that it has been refereed by my psychic goldfish, and expect to be taken seriously. Similarly, I cannot start a philosophical debate on ethics with reference to my own personal values, and claim that my arguments have all been validated by Trixie the omniscient and invisible leprechaun, and expect to be taken seriously."(Molyneux) According to the writer, "The very act of debating requires an acceptance of universally preferable behaviour (UPB). There is no way to rationally respond to an ethical argument without exhibiting UPB." (Molyneux) That is, for any two parties to engage in an argument regarding ethics, they must be necessarily playing by the same rules of the game.The next logical step should be essentially to determine exactly how these rules of the game are to be drafted; that is to characterize what we mean by 'preferable' behavior, and how can we 'universalize' any such behavioral instances. This is again clarified by Molyneux, the author of the idea of the 'universally preferable behavior' (UPB), as: "When I say that some preferences may be objective, I do not mean that all people follow these preferences at all times. If I were to argue that *breathing* is an objective preference, I could be easily countered by the example of those who commit suicide by hanging themselves. If I were to argue that eating is an objective preference, my argument

could be countered with examples of hunger strikes and anorexia.Thus when I talk about universal preferences, I am talking about what people *should* prefer, not what they always *do* prefer. To use a scientific analogy, to truly understand the universe, people *should* use the scientific method – this does not mean that they always do so, since clearly billions of people consult ancient fairy tales rather than modern science for "answers.""

Another theoretical argument for the possibility of Secular Ethics, can be found in an extrapolation of the previous argument of ethics grounded in 'compassion'. It is simply the idea that humans are ready to *give* compassion because they *need* reciprocated compassion. It is based on the idea posited that "Humans are social creatures.Human infants cannot survive on their own, and human adults are much weaker than many of the predators found in the savannas we originally evolved in. Because we need other people, actions that harm other people or society at large are considered wrong."(MacDonald)It is more or less the same as the original argument, only engineered slightly to appeal more to an ethical egoist.

The 'Euthyphro Dilemma' also aids in setting up of the theoretical framework of objective morality, independent of religion; the argument springing essentially from a refutation of the counter-philosophy of religion-derived morality. The Euthyphro Dilemma concerns a question posed by Socrates to Euthyphro: "Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?" (Plato). It provides a logical procedure, which denies religion any special proprietorship over objective morality:

"Are things good because god says so, or does he/she/it say that they are good because they are good?

A) God either has good reasons for declaring certain things as moral and other things as immoral or he/she/it does not have good reasons for declaring certain things as moral and other things as immoral.

B) If god does not have good reasons to declare certain things as immoral and other things as moral, then it must be the case that if god declared things such as rape and murder to be moral, that they would in fact be moral. If this is the case then even the most basic moral standards are completely arbitrary.

C) If god has good reasons to declare certain things as moral and others as immoral then those reasons must exist independently of him and therefore, god does not decide morality but rather reports moral truths that are made true by independent features of those things." (Guevara)

A similar but reverse process of argumentation is engaged in by Ryan to argue that objective morality is as much a property of atheists, as it is of theists. Here the writer proceeds to, again, illustrate by a logical series of steps, how morality may exist outside the realm of religion:

"Consider the implication of the question: without God, there is no reason to behave morally.

For this to be true, one of the following must also be true:

1.) Actions have no consequences

2.) We do not care about the consequences of our actions

3.) Morality (i.e. God's law) is arbitrary

The first two possibilities are clearly false. All of my actions have consequences and I make my decisions according to the extent that they satisfy or thwart my desires. If morality is non-arbitrary, then I clearly do have reasons to behave morally.

This brings us to the third possibility. If morality is arbitrary, then I have no reason to behave morally.

If the theist who asks this question still insists that atheists have no reason to behave morally, then he must also accept that God's rules are arbitrary. If he insists that God's rules are not arbitrary, then he must admit that atheists do have reasons to behave morally." (Ryan)

However, opponents of this perspective, of religion-derived ethics being merely a subset of a universal set of objective moral principles, hold that the concept of God is a necessary ingredient for any form of morality, arguing that the concept of retribution, and of Heaven and Hell, are indispensable deterrents found within religious philosophy; which ensure that humans do not err- either for fear of an infernal fire, or for the temptations of an eternity of pleasure in prospective after-life. This is fundamentally suggesting that humans require external motivation to act in an ethical manner, contrary to notions of any innate sense of morality. This, however, provides a very bleak view of human nature, and detracts from the very idea of morality; as agreed by Simon Blackburn in his article 'Morality without God':

"- if religion's contribution to morality is, at base, a matter of bribing us to behave well for fear of supernatural consequences, then it is only a poor substitute for the real thing—like Kant's shopkeeper giving the right change only because he was afraid of being caught cheating. Such action may accord with a principle of honesty, but he is not acting from that principle, which is what the properly moral person does. I help my child with his homework because he needs help, not to obey the dictates of a supernatural commandant.

The sophisticated religionist will reply that it is not like this: God's schedule of rewards and punishments is for teaching purposes, "leading strings" as Kant called them, pulling the child, say, towards concern for the helpless. The end-product is the love of others, and the love of principle and justice. Perhaps so, but in that case religious hopes and terrors have nothing essential to do with the motives of morality, any more than parental admonitions, even if they too were accompanied with threats of hellfire."(Blackburn)

Theistic moral philosophers also make other popular claims, those along the idea of a 'conscience'; the naggings of which humans cannot help but feel when they perpetrate crimes against other humans. They argue that the 'conscience' is nothing but the voice of a God. "- conscience has absolute, exceptionless, binding moral authority over us, demanding unqualified obedience. But only a perfectly good, righteous divine will has this authority and a right to absolute, exceptionless obedience. Therefore conscience is the voice of the will of God."(Kreeft) Therefore, as the 'conscience' is in itself what may be otherwise termed the innate sense of objective morality; the latter may not exist independent of God. However, the purpose of this essay still emerges unscathed from any such argument as it argues neither to prove, nor to nullify the claim existence of a God. Objective morality may exist with or without God, but the claim of this paper is that such an objective morality *does*exist- whether it is called 'conscience', or by some other name, is trivial to our purpose here.

Arguably, humans must have a sense of morality irrespective of the dictates of a Supreme God, because of the conception of the very God in faith, or religion generally being that of a Being endorsing and exemplifying the highest possible standards of morality- the precept of 'God is goodness'(Dillon), which is hailed universally by all religions. It is imperative to acknowledge here that it is only possible to revere such a notion of God if His worshippers were already equipped with an innate sense of right and wrong, or morality, so as to appreciate these virtues in their God, and to identify with them.Simon Blackburn concludes it beautifully: "Morality is a natural phenomenon. Its roots lie in our needs and our capacities for sympathetically imagining the feelings of others, for inventing co-operative principles, for being able to take an impersonal view of our own doings. We have what Adam Smith called a "man within the breast" monitoring our feelings and actions in the name of those with whom we live. Imagining their admiration, we feel pride; imagining their anger, guilt, their contempt, shame."

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