ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

Colin Bower

Nobody Exists on Purpose

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies

In partial fulfillment of the Senior Comprehensive Project Requirement
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy **[OR]** Religious Studies
4/28/16

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I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College community as a whole.

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Approved by:

(First Reader's Signature)

(Second Reader's Signature)

Introduction

Does our existence have inherent value? Large swaths of the population would respond with an unequivocal yes. It's a decided fact that we see demonstrated on a daily basis. It has been

so ingrained within us that we may not even contemplate the reasoning used to produce such a claim, which seems problematic. As I see it, in western society the justifications for our inherent value resides in the belief that our existence as both a species and individuals is unique and separate from all other forms of being. This separation is generated by some eternal, absolute, component from which experience of a self comes about and defines one's identity as their own. These beliefs are the hidden foundation that the worth of one's existence is built upon. We've accepted the results without questioning the premises. It seems necessary that these claims are investigated and I've been happy to see that such investigations are being integrated into the mainstream through television. Specifically the Adult Swim animated series *Rick and Morty* has an unapologetic approach to confronting these claims behind the meaning of life with extreme skepticism.

The show is centered around the Smith family, parents Beth and Jerry and their children Morty and Summer, when Beth's estranged father Rick returns after a twenty year absence. Rick is an cynical, alcoholic mad scientist whose extreme intellect and inventions ultimately disrupt the typical existence that his family has come to know. Rick has a flying ship and a portal gun that allow him to travel to the edges of our universe as well as into parallel dimensions. His travels through the expanses of space have left him jaded and apathetic to notions of the value of our existence. He has first hand experience of the true insignificance of the human existence and has no problem letting others know. It can generate feelings of existential dread, and the show places Rick's devotion to scientific advancement as his counter to what he sees as some sort of misguided blissful ignorance. Rick is an agent of chaos and destruction on the comfort that we have built for ourselves as a society. He acts as if he is unattached and unbothered, a true practitioner of nihilism in every sense of the word. Yet throughout the course of the series he is

deeply affected and distressed by the conditions of his circumstances. He is in a position to answer any question that may arise, but he is restless and unsatisfied with what these answers provide.

This dissatisfaction in the face of omniscience is not a coincidence, but a deliberate feature of the show's underlying philosophical understanding of the value of human existence. In an interview the show's co-creator, Dan Harmon, is quoted "the knowledge that nothing matters, while accurate, gets you nowhere. The planet is dying, the sun is exploding, the universe is cooling, nothing's gonna matter; the further back you pull the more that truth will endure. But when you zoom in on Earth, when you zoom in to a family, when you zoom into a human brain and a childhood and experience, you see all these things that matter." This outlook will be the perspective from which the investigation is framed. I wish to demonstrate that the widely held conceptions of our existence may not withstand scrutiny, showing that we are merely a feature of the world we live in rather than an unrelated being that enters the world from outside. The final chapter will advocate that this is not reason to abandon all hope and reject existence but that one can have a meaningful existence with this new understanding.

Chapter 1 - Biological Generation of the Self Experience

Undoubtedly, humanity has great esteem for the value inherent in our own existence. We recognize ourselves as a unique occurrence, set apart from all other organisms by a whole new way of being. Many believe it is because we were placed here with intentionality by some outside force of universal order. By attempting to truly understand oneself in the context of a

greater scale one may questions the standards that we have established for meaning in our lives. Rick and Morty provides an environment that these issues can once again be brought to light for our consideration. Primarily it revolves around questions of the value of existence from a seemingly antagonistic viewpoint that argues our existence does not have the intentionality we believe it does. Rick has seen thousands of versions of himself from thousands of different universes, and as he sees it none of them exist for any particular reason. Rick embraces this ideology and tries to spread it. He tells his granddaughter, "there is no god, Summer, gotta rip that bandaid off now, you'll thank me later" (S1Ep1). We do not exist on purpose or in conjunction with some greater plan, we just happen to be. Even if this is the case, there is a societal consensus that selves exist unlike anything else and that we are all one of them, and that there is something special that makes me one "I" as opposed to another.

The value of our existence is attributed to the essence of our being, a predetermined intrinsic quality. We believe we have an essence above and beyond any others that we have observed, and that our experience in the world is different because of it. Our existence is different from others because we are aware of it. "I think therefore I am" has infiltrated our conceptions of selfhood to the very core. At the center of all potential quandaries and doubts that may be sown, one takes consolation in knowing that they exist as a thinking being if nothing else, that is what one is essentially. Prescription of an essence a necessary step towards administering value, because the entity now has definition and parameters for assessment. Many western religions link this to the capacity to a soul which is an eternal non-physical aspect of an eternal self. It turns the subjective experience into something of objective value. At the core the assumption is that our origin is outside the happenings of the physical world. Rick understands

humanity and our experience in a strictly biological sense, and believes investigation outside this context is a waste of time.

> "Listen, Morty, I hate to break it to you but what people call "love" is just a chemical reaction that compels animals to breed. It hits hard, Morty, then it slowly fades, leaving you stranded in a failing marriage. I did it. Your parents are gonna do it. Break the cycle, Morty. Rise above. Focus on science. "(S1Ep6)

Removing the self from the body may be comforting and convenient but this model leaves serious issues to be addressed if our experience can be demonstrated to be a naturally occuring feature of the universal landscape.

Much of the resistance to tackling this dualism is generated by the perceived ramifications of accepting a materialistic model of our existence. Our mind defines us, not the collections of flesh and blood that move about in the world. The separation of the mind from the brain elevates one's conception what it means to be a "self". It puts one leaps and bounds ahead when compared to any other brain-having organism found in nature, because our true nature is not of this world which is why we can interact with it the way we do. One looks in the mirror and sees an autonomous being, one who make decisions, not some sort of organic machine that relies on an input/output dialog. We cherish that we are a species set apart, one that has more than reactions to stimulus, we have interpretations of experiences. A species no longer simply concerned with survival, but living. Why would anyone seek to destabilize the pedestal which we have erected for ourselves? According to Rick, " scientifically, traditions are an idiot thing", so one should not hesitate investigation into the origin of their own being. In an attempt to dispute the necessity of absolute essence to existential value the following chapter will use arguments from Dennett to explain our existence today as the culmination of a continuous process in the

world not an administration of essence from an external source. Although our experience of existence appears different, it will be revealed to be a result of the same indifferent process that creates all things. Following this revelation we must then pose the question if this experience is not as rigidly defined through essence as we once thought then how must our understanding of ourselves shift in response?

Our experience revolves around conscious thought, and it may not be incredibly apparent initially, but to be a thinking thing the first prerequisite is time. This is the medium that supports the presence of consciousness, and ultimately sets up parameters in which will lead to the collapse of the mind/body separation theory, because at its core it assumes we are beings who are of concrete definition. It has taken millions of years of development to become who we are today as a species, and in every moment we only develop further. What it means to be human has had as many answers as we have had generations of people. By observing the trajectory of humanities progress we can show that who we are cannot be assigned to some outside influence. We are privy to the contents of our own mind through the stream of consciousness, and one never has to doubt that they are currently having thoughts, but what happens when one tries to pin down the origin of an idea? On a larger time scale one can say when an idea appeared, but as one looks closer the precision is difficult to maintain. The experience of conscious thought has been implicated as unrestricted access to our minds, but this is largely because of our understanding of ourselves as concrete and definite. This access, unrestricted or not, signifies the creation of a point of view. There is now an "I" who is subject to experiences. Substance dualism typically uses the analogy of a person in the audience of a theater watching and making discriminations about a film. The viewer represents the non-physical essence that controls our actions in our lives, thus the thing that makes one who they are. The film in theater can be

broken into the sequences that have been viewed and those that have not or conscious experience and some form of raw sensory data. This model faces increasing difficulty with real world application as we learn more about the operations of the human brain and shorten the interval of brain activity being studied.

Even ignoring the problem of locating this mysterious pathway which generates physical and non-physical interaction, this explanation is backed into a corner because it suggests that there is a specific time that can be declared as the moment that consciousness occured. "Before time *t* the thing was not understood; after time *t* it was understood-- a clearly marked shift of state that can often be accurately timed, even though it is, emphatically, a subjectively accessible, introspectively discovered transition" (Dennett, 58). A point of view is extrapolated from sensory input, however one's brain is flooded with constant variations of incoming information from a number of sources. Different types of sensory data (visual, sensory, auditory) must be processed by separate parts of the brain. Dualism requires a point for them to all come together for viewing in the theater, to transform raw data into representations compatible with perception. However these different sources of data not only arrive at different times and interact with separate parts of the brain, but also have variability in the time required to transmit the signal that the brain is receiving. There is no uniformity in time of arrival or departure of information at these specialized regions. This is a problem for substance dualism because despite a continuous experience from our perspective, the stream from which the conscious point of view is harvested is spread throughout regions of the brain, staggered spatially and temporally, which challenges the legitimacy of the cartesian theater in actuality (Dennett, 107). How can a brain assemble unified presentations for conscious observation at a specific moment in time and space if the information is inherently scattered over several moments?

In reality, the differentiation in stimuli stands opposed to the notion that any singular time or space in the brain can be singled out as the location of consciousness. Dennett explains that this is simply because it does not exist. Under increased scrutiny any attempt for real world application of the Cartesian theater quickly crumbles, yet many still cling to this analogy because it is compatible with their own interpretation of how they experience the world. If our experience comes from something that this world cannot explain than it is literally above the world and can be valued as a rarity. No matter how convenient, this model does not hold up in the actuality of time and space which prompts the generation of a new explanation. Dennett contends that this barrier to understanding consciousness is not only invisible, but also imaginary. We have placed it there by the framing of our own understanding of the situation. "So far we have actually been treating consciousness itself as something of a black box. We have taken its "behavior" (=phenomenology) as a "given" and wondered about what sort of hidden mechanisms in the brain could explain it" (Dennett, 172). We understand our true self as existing separately, as its own entity, with demonstrated characteristics, behaviors, and abilities that in turn define our experience. This approach leaves the investigator unable to take a first step forward towards truth and understanding, because it is working in the wrong direction. "Now lets reverse the strategy, and think about the evolution of brain mechanisms for doing this and that, and see if anything that emerges gives us a plausible mechanism for explaining some of the puzzling "behaviors" of our conscious brains" (Dennett, 172). Rather than our experience being handed to us from above, it was built from the ground up.

According to Dennett the aspects of our experience that we ascribe as our essence can actually be explained as a result of the layering of successive evolutionary processes. The first layer that he presents in the evolutionary timeline to consciousness is the establishment of

boundaries and the development of reason. The earliest form of life came to be in simple replicators. No one would argue that they ever had anything close to the conscious thought of a human, but the precursor to it is not so simple to dismiss. “The first reasons preexisted their recognition” (Dennett, 174). They may not appear conscious but any organism can have interests assigned to it based on its capabilities in the world. In the case of these organisms, they possess the ability to replicate, but this replication is dependent on certain external conditions being met. This means that the world can now be assessed from the replicator’s point of view. This simple being may not actually hold any thoughts on the matter but nonetheless there are now conditions that will support their replication and conditions that will hinder it, or more simply the world can now be assessed in terms of value or good and bad. Value is rooted in a being’s capability.

If there are reasons then there are points of view from which to evaluate them. Evaluation by an agent requires that there is a capability to distinguish the “here inside” from the “external world”. This ability to distinguish has now warped into an assessment that places us outside of the world itself. With relative goods and bads to be recognized the brain must now additionally exist as an anticipation machine because if a threat cannot be detected preemptively then detection is functionally useless. The more powerful the brain the more quickly it can anticipate and the farther into the future it can look with greater levels of accuracy. In evolutionary history it began with creatures who demonstrated no planning and simply continued forward until a threat was detected and the nervous system triggered a recoil mechanism. As we progress forward in evolutionary time the brain expands to allow for “short-range” anticipation, which are often hard wired as part of the system to increase the range at which danger can be avoided. Many organisms have visual systems that are sensitive to noticing patterns as a sort of warning

system. However, the accuracy of the report is (potentially) sacrificed for the speed and economy with which it is received.

This time saved allows for an increased number of discriminations to be made at a greater spatial and temporal distance. Hardwired response mechanisms can trigger an awareness, which can lead to further discriminations of friend, foe, or food? Obviously in the world today humans are capable of much more sophisticated means of discrimination but the threat of perception/reality distinctions still remains. One's experience may belong to them, but that does not guarantee unilateral infallibility. However, we have developed a system that ensures the rate of mistakes are low enough that our evolutionary progression has sped up not slowed down by these mechanisms. Our enhanced ability for interpretation has blossomed as a result of evolutionary anticipation through the birth of curiosity. "Regular vigilance turned into regular exploration, and a new behavioral strategy began to evolve: the strategy of acquiring information "for its own sake," just in case it might prove valuable someday" (Dennett, 181). The more information we have about our environment the more successfully we can navigate through it, and the less likely we are to misinterpret perceptions about it.

This curiosity is essential. The self is never definite but constantly shaped from external input, and increasing exposure to input helps to make the self a more effective survival machine or a better self. This "just in case" information is stored to address some sort of potential change. Any preparation for change indicates that there are assumed givens and constants among certain conditions; gravity's constant exertion, the biological need for water, the rotation of the earth around the sun, etc. Successful organisms are shaped through natural selection with mechanisms that have hard wired responses to apparent constants, as well as the ability to adapt to the small scale unpredictable changes that inevitably occur. "They are, or are influenced by, processes that

are chaotic. In these cases, no one stereotyped design will accommodate itself to all eventualities, so better organisms will be those that can redesign themselves to some degree to meet the conditions they encounter" (Dennett, 183). These changes are an ever-present possibility, but never a guarantee. One cannot develop a hardwired response to some environmental factor which has neither a constant trigger nor any guarantee of eventual manifestation, so they must have the ability to respond to unknowns.

Postnatal design-fixing refers to the full scale of all learning and developmental potential of an organism demonstrated during its life (Dennett, 183). Dennett states that any such design fixing comes about as a result of a physical process that has operations that are analogous to natural selection, through the plasticity of our brain and its capability for redesign. We are placed in an ever changing environment so it would seem foolish that our capabilities are set in stone. This capability for development of self introduces a new medium for evolution within the individual, which can speed up the process within a population exponentially through a process known as the Baldwin effect. It claims that individual learning can enhance evolutionary learning at the species level. This benefit is demonstrated through the thought experiment of "the good trick." It proposes that there are organisms with potential variability of brain wiring among individuals and among the options there is one that allows the organism to perform "a good trick" which greatly enhances its survival probability. "If a particularly winning setting is thereby discovered, this discovery will create a new selection pressure:organisms that are closer in the adaptive landscape to that discovery will have a clear advantage over those more distant. This means that species with plasticity will tend to evolve faster (and more clearsightedly) than those without it" (Dennett, 186). Individuals born without this trick wired in still have a chance to learn it through interactions and curious investigation. When teaching and learning is possible, not

every individual has to be the source of all of their habits, so the group as a whole can focus their attention elsewhere and advance more quickly. These adaptations are adopted on the large scale and become the norm until such a time that conflict arises and adjustments have to be made.

In the evolutionary timescale, our ancestors saw an astronomical growth in the size of their brains in a relatively short period, for disputed reasons, "but there is little controversy about the nature of the product: the brain of early Homo sapiens (who live from roughly 150,000 years ago to the end of the most recent ice age a mere 10,000 years ago) was an enormously complex brain of unrivaled plasticity, almost indistinguishable from ours in size and shape" (Dennett, 190). This growth started well before, and was essentially finished before, we as a species had developed language, practices of agriculture and cooking, or one could say established culture of norms of any kind. In the last ten thousand years human beings have not seen any wild physical development in our brains, they are of similar size and capability, yet modern humans are so much more successful because we have the benefit of 10,000 years of ancestors exploiting the plasticity of the brain in search of new good tricks, that we as a species have subsequently centered our development around, we have learned to be ourselves.

This "software" expanded the brain's capability as an anticipation machine but also developed new means of response to the environment. The brain is almost always collecting information about its environment and monitors any changes of the potentially fluctuating features. Changes are met with some form of representation that directs the focus of the organism to theses developments. There's moment to moment data collection, and changes in one's environment are met with changes in the brain to respond. Following this line of thought, hunger and thirst are representations of the brain manifested by physical changes in the brain as a response to changes of an organism's environmental features. However, the human brain today is

capable of representing things like Paris and Atlantis, and by the same logic their representation is generated by separate physical brain processes. “How can a particular state or event in the brain represent one feature of the world rather than another? And whatever it is that make some feature of the brain represent what it represents, how does it come to represent what it represents” (Dennett, 192). Dennett proposes that some parts of the system of representation are hardwired while others are learned. This newest method for environmental response comes in the form of advanced representation, which ultimately culminates in culture. As thinking things we have developed systems for representation in the context of our adopted good tricks to better our survival chances by creating, learning, and teaching these systems. Species with this brain plasticity allows for another exponential increase in the speed of evolutionary processes through cultural evolution. Questions can be answered from the information that others have compiled rather than having to discover it all from the from a blank slate. Not only can we learn, but also learn to learn more efficiently. As the stores of knowledge grow so does our capability, and the fruits of these labors are able to be passed between individuals which accelerates the whole process.

The sharing of information with language prompted an internal medium for evolution to occur simultaneously. These transmissions of information are subject to a process analogous to the natural selection that of their genetic counterparts. Culture is developed through information sharing and as homosapiens began to associate information representations with language, certain aspects of the language became identifiable as a specific unit of of cultural transmission, also known as a meme. “Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm and eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme

pool leaping from brain to brain via a process which in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dennett, 202). Memes are simply a new type of replicator, seeking viability in a new environment: the brain. They can be recognized as tools that accelerate our advancement as a whole, but they can also question the assumed dynamic that thoughts and ideas belong to the individual. As such one begins to question their essence as outside the world. Am I merely a vessel infiltrated by ideas and controlled by them in the hopes of promoting their replication?

A mind is a brain that has undergone restructuring to become a better habitat for memes and it is this renovation, not our source of origin, that seems to set our existential experience apart from others. However, we still lack any absolute metric for assigning these memes value because we have no scale by which to measure their virtue outside of the ones provided by other memes. "We should not that the memes for normative concepts - for ought and good and truth and beauty - are among the most entrenched denizens of our minds, and that among the memes that constitute us, they play a central role. Our existence as us, as what we as thinkers are- not as what we organisms are- is not independent of these memes" (Dennett, 208). There is seemingly no fruitful way to judge the merit of memes outside of their replicative power, because our conceptions of merit are inherently influenced by other memes. Development of human consciousness is a demonstration of evolution in three different mediums: genetic variation, phenotypic plasticity, and memetic evolution. As this has been explained it becomes clear that the world in which we live has a large effect on the way we exist. We evolved to this highest point by the transfer of such memes, but their validity only stands in the structure of the world. Our capabilities may be different, but they came about as a result of the same formative physical processes of the universe that makes all things.

Dennett attempts to define what we experience through the multiple drafts model which can work with this constant flurry of information and remove the necessity of the theater's existence. What we are is constantly growing because we are never unaffected by our environment. Whether it's facts of nature or matters of culture interaction with them change us . "Feature detections or discriminations only have to be made once. That is, once a particular, "observation" of some feature has been made, by a specialized, localized portion of the brain, the information content thus fixed does not have to be sent somewhere else to be discriminated by some "master" discriminator" (Dennett, 113). Once the information has arrived in the brain it is a part of us. It immediately has some bearing on how we'll approach the future regardless of if we realize it or not. The contents affect us directly without the need for it to be sent out for some secondary interpretation by the "real us", because there is no such thing. Our experience, which defines us, cannot be identified in a single moment because it is not present in any of these bits and pieces of external information but as an amalgamation of them all overlapping. Over the course of time a constant process of continued adjustments to new discoveries begins to resemble something similar to a narrative structure, extending indefinitely into the future.

However this narrative is not set in stone, it is subject to continual editing and revision depending upon which repository of data is prominent at a given moment. There is no, one, true canonical conscious experience. "Contents arise, get revised, contribute to the interpretation of other contents or to the modulation of behavior (verbal or otherwise), and in the process leave their traces in memory, which then eventually decay or get incorporated into or overwritten by later contents, wholly or in part" (Dennett, 135). There is a constant stacking of interpretations from an ever expanding reservoir of information. One is left to face the fact that their existence may not be as rigid in definition as they had once believed. Rather than having a self outside the

world which chooses to interact, we are left with a self that is built by the world. Dennett is we are in a constant process of creating ourselves, as such we must be essentially linked to our environment. The following chapters will turn the attention to the ontological and epistemological implications of what it means to be a self whose existence requires a world to be.

Chapter 2 - Intersubjective Self and Conditional Values

The first section of this project sought to challenge the notion that our experience supported the essence of the self, as a thinking being which has a distinct separation from the world in which it thinks. Dennett provided an evolutionary explanation that allows for existence as we know it today to arise as the product of a complicated system of highly interrelated, evolutionary biological mechanisms functioning over an extended period of time. These self-generating processes are driven directly by the external world in which the self comes into being. This section seeks to more accurately define our fundamental placement in the universe by presenting a theory of being that counters our current model which is rooted in a binary of isolation. The assumption is that we live a life separate and independent from both the world in which they live and the people that they live alongside. This perceived independence has value to us because it bestows a sense of freedom and control, which is seen as a prerequisite to value judgements. However, the previous chapter's theory attributes the possibility of our experience to the brain's operation as a biological processor, but its functionality is the result of a direct relationship with the world (including other such brain-having beings). Thus it must follow that

the nature of our being, and any value we attempt to attach is inherently intersubjective and grounded in the world, which threatens the independence of the individual as well as unconditional truths.

Before one can appraise the specifics of their existence further investigation into what existence actually is must be done. In the Heideggerian definition our existence is more than simply physical manifestation as an entity in the world, but a dichotomy between the world and its structure. These manifestations are known as the ontic, which refers to all the specific, concrete, instances of observable matter. Heidegger is only interested in identifying the ontology for the type of being that humans are, which he calls Dasein. "Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among the other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned about its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Dasein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. And this in turn means that Dasein understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper to his being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being" (Heidegger, 11). In his definition he points out that we are a unique type of being because we are concerned with our own being. Our existence is indeed ontically occurring alongside all things, but we have an ontic characteristic of concern for the ontological and we are the only beings that we know of that do so. We as humans are aware that we exist as finite beings, and this knowledge impacts us to our very core. Yet according to Heidegger questions of the true nature of being have been ignored for centuries. In an effort to clarify why this has happened he points to the apparent differences that exist between entities and their being. Entities are all the things that are, have been, or will be in the world. Things "that are" are always entities, so "to be" is to be an entity, however "being" itself

is never an entity. There is no possibility of a physical manifestation that adequately represents what being "is".

Phenomenological description can only be attributed to the ontic because such an ontological structure is in place. The distinction that Heidegger wishes to establish is that ontical investigations are invested in entities as they are, while ontological issues are those concerned with the conditions that make such a being possible (Haugeland, 54). Our societies grow and our knowledge of the world around us does as well. It would seem logical that our quest for this understanding will eventually reveal some absolute truth about ourselves, but not according to Heidegger. We are heavily concerned with issues of ontical knowledge and have been largely satisfied with the answers they provide about the space around us, but our fundamental structure is occupying both ontic and ontological space. We fail to recognize that even complete understanding of the ontic will not allow us to fully know ourselves. Ontical knowledge is never fundamental, because intelligibility is only possible within an established context. Rather than trying to understand the being of this entity in the world, the question should be regarding the being of being itself.

Ontological concern as an ontic feature would imply that any worldly interactions have potential to provide some ontological understanding. One's actions are always related to their fundamental structure because our being is to understand our being, and we do this just by being ourselves. By definition we are entities whose mode of being is at least in some form self referential. One exists in awareness of one's existence, and this awareness is a foundational aspect. Thus we can use this understanding in the hopes of grasping our being in the larger context. Heidegger emphasizes that phenomenology is the only method to move this investigation of the being question forward. Our actions are relational to our place in the universe

and we can recognize this fact. If observed from the correct perspective they can reveal a great deal into its true structure. Just by existing, one is actively generating fodder for the flame of their existential concern, by which one can become visible to oneself. "From the investigation itself we shall see that the methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation. The *logos* of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of *hermeneia*, through which the proper meaning of being and the basic structures of the very being of Dasein are made known to the understanding of being that belongs to Dasein itself" (Heidegger, 35). He frames the investigation as a work of interpretation. Allowing pre-existing meaning, the ontological, to be seen by viewing it in the context of the ontic way of being that corresponds to it. All phenomena of all inner worldly occurrences, have a larger ontological system that makes them possible. The phenomena generated by our experience, is necessarily done in relation to our own ontological assembly. However, the prolonged focus on the ontic has resulted in a society unable to look past phenomena. The assumed understanding has established ontic phenomena to be taken for granted as the fundamental base, rather than pieces within a larger structure. The ontological has faded into obscurity, but this hermeneutic phenomenology allows the structures of existence to be made visible (Haugeland, 72). It is precisely these invisible practices of one's everyday existence, the seemingly mundane and uninteresting, that Heidegger suggests that we direct our focus towards because it will reveal that our identity is not necessarily ours or absolute.

This is because the notion of "everydayness" is intimately linked to the process of our existence. Everydayness is what happens when culture forming memes have established dominance and settled for the time being. Through observation, Heidegger determines that Dasein's structure at the most basic level is described as "being-in-the-world", and is thus the

starting point for assessment. This definition of Dasein as being-in-the-world is presented as a singular unitary descriptor that cannot be broken up into distinct pieces, yet it is also defined as "having a multiplicity of constitutive structural factors" (Heidegger, 53). Heidegger highlights three such facets as the "in-the-world", the "being", and the "being-in as such" of being-in-the-world. Through this unification, one is presented with some stark differences between the current conception of the essence of self. We manifest as an entity, within a particular world, with a particular way of being in that world. In existence as we know it, no single aspect of that assembly can be excluded, establishing that the concept of world is a vital component of its essence and discrediting beliefs of independence. The Cartesian interpretation sees a self and a world as separate resulting in an interaction between the two. In essence Descartes is stating that he can imagine a self that exists without the world. Heidegger is claiming that the "being in" is an essential aspect of which determines the existence we experience.

Many see the essential nature of humanity as a spiritual entity that exists preemptively, that is then subsequently placed into a world with which it can interact. It is focused within the ontic world, with the essential nature of the being linked to a soul-substance that exists in spatial relationship to other substances. "According to what we have said, being-in is not a "property" which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, without which it could be just as well as it could with it. It is not the case that human being "is," and then on top of that has a relation of being to the "world" which it sometimes takes upon itself. Dasein is never "initially" a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in a mood to take up a "relation" to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only because, as being-in-the-world, Dasein is as it is"(Heidegger, 57). Dasein is ontologically aware of the world that it inhabits, and can have not existence outside of it. However the world exists as a

series of interacting entities, merely an assembly of phenomena. The ontic phenomena are the world that Descartes latches to but being is tied to the ontological world or as Heidegger calls it, worldliness.

"Worldliness is an ontological concept and designates the structure of a constitutive factor of being-in-the-world…. "World" is ontologically not a determination of those beings which Dasein essentially is not, but rather a characteristic of Dasein itself" (Heidegger, 64). Being-in implies a necessity for a location for existence, but the ontological location of being is not equivalent to the ontic spatial relationship between inner-worldly entities. Our identity, and any potential for value is bound to the worldliness by which the ontic world is constructed. Following the assembly of worldliness, understanding of ways to be can be developed in reference to it. Our way of being is our understanding of the world. Effectively it defines us as our possibilities, and any possibilities have been established by the conditions of a particular worldliness, or in other words our identity by experience in not absolutely our own, which undermines our prescription of inherent value. As understanding of worldliness is developed and expanded, the sense of everydayness is generated as a widespread adoption of ways to be. When exiting a room, one twists the doorknob, pushes the door, and walks through the plane of the doorway but none of these steps have to be actively considered to be successfully executed. Doors are a part of the society in which one resides and thus the understanding of doors and how to use them must be implicit in us if we are to have any sort of successful existence in such a door-having world.

Everydayness arises from shared ways of being, if there were no communal aspects then there would be no way of being that could be said to be Dasein specifically. Everydayness presents itself as a demonstration of intersubjectivity, which leads one to the realization that the

answer to the question of our existence is not a "what" but a "who", that is who is doing the understanding? "Dasein is a being which I myself am, its being is in each case mine. This determination indicates an ontological constitution, but no more than that. At the same time, it contains an ontic indication, albeit an undifferentiated one, that an I is always this being, and not others" (Heidegger, 112). This quote introduces another multifaceted yet unitary aspect of how our existence is actualized. Dasein is in each case an "I", specifically differentiated from some sort of other. The concept of mineness equates existence with a definition of ownership, that one must make some claim to one's own being. From where, or whom, is this being claimed? The others, which Heidegger presents as *they*. "It itself is not; the others have taken its being away from it. The everyday possibilities of Dasein are at the disposal of the whims of others" (Heidegger, 122). In the ontic world the I is always and continuously subjected to the *they,* because *they* are what has already been established as the way of being in everydayness. Dasein is only its possibilities and by the establishment of everydayness as an expectation of how to be, limits are placed on what Dasein can be. *They* does not refer to any particular individual, group, or sum of all others. It is what all are, yet is never definitive. In existence, the I of Dasein begins to recognize differences between itself and the others, but *they* are always looking to close the gap. This closing of the gap is the process by which the I's claim to Dasein is taken away from itself and if it closes the gap completely the process of existence will come to an end.

They exist as a form of averageness. The "average of Dasein" has no definite measure because it is a process that results in fluctuations of definition but *they* are always looking to dissolve the fluctuations caused by the I of Dasein by taking credit for its advances and minimizing them. Leaps ahead by the I are dragged back until it serves as the center, the new starting point for the averageness of the *they*. "Overnight, everything that is original is flattened

down as something long since known. Everything won through struggle becomes something manageable. Every mystery loses its power. The care of averageness reveals, in turn, an essential tendency of Dasein, which we call the leveling down of all possibilities of being" (Heidegger, 123). This concept of leveling down can be easily demonstrated by a close look at our everydayness. Life goes by without the blink of an eye, but when compared to the everydayness of those 100, 50, or even 10 years ago, we seem to live in some fantasy world. Today we have computers, that we carry around in our pocket, that are more powerful than anything that was produced in the previous century and not one of us stands in awe. This is our normal. Astronomical advances are tethered and wrestled into submission until such a point that it becomes manageable for mainstream distribution and consumption. Then the sights are once again towards the amazing from this new normal.

This abduction of authorship poses a danger by making the I of Dasein overly comfortable. By taking credit for the I and closing the gap, *they* are essentially removing responsibility of our own actions from us. If we accept all standards for living we become subservient to the *they* by our inability to seek deviations from their establishment, and the forward momentum of our existence has halted. This notion of being as process, progress and evolution is a key aspect of our existence. This potential for non being is a definitive aspect of our experience which supports our ever changing ways of being. The looming threat of extinction is necessary contrast by which to define the being that we have. We cannot exist in stagnation, there must be a forward moving trajectory. In this motion we develop new ways of understanding, fundamentally changing what our being is at its core. If the point ever comes that this momentum is lost, so too is the existence. We are only our possibilities and acceptance of just one outcome is the same as death.

We are beings that are defined by the always ongoing, cycle of never ending processes, constantly pushing boundaries and changing definition and direction. However if *they* succeed in completely absorbing the I then the process will have reached a resolution, making us a being of finitude and thus marking the end of our existence. It may be tempting to label a force that could bring about the end of existence as entirely negative, but actually it is merely a trade off for the conditions of our being. If our existence is a collection of all possibilities, then it would make sense that non-existence would be somewhere on the list whether it comes about or not. Proper recognition of our communal aspect is just as, if not more, important in understanding our true nature. "In other words Dasein would be a way of being that many individuals find themselves partaking in and, thus, one that is inherently intersubjective" (Stroh, 246). Haugeland proposes the idea of an individual person as "case of Dasein" as a precipitate of a "collective Dasein". A case of dasein is a individual who acts on an understanding of being that has been transferred from the community, or the collective *they*. Thus any instance of an individual perspective in a case of Dasein is only possible by coming to be in some way as a derivative of communal Dasein in which they came to be. " The world of Dasein frees the beings encountered for a totality of relevance which is familiar to the *they* in the limits which are established with the averageness of the *they*. Initially, factical Dasein is in the with-world, discovered in an average way. Initially, "I" "am" not in the sense of my own self, but I am the others in the mode of the they. In terms of the they, and as the they, I am initially "given" to "myself." Initially Dasein is the *they* and for the most part it remains so" (Heidegger, 125). This is an important distinction to make: *they* may erase the I, but the I could not be without being the *they* first.

This relationship between the collective and the singular nature of our existence is a result of the structure of its specific mode of being. For being-in-the-world to manifest, there

must be a world and a being, but this also necessitates that in relation to the ontological structure of the world the way of being is already established in its possibilities. Heidegger refers to it as the thrownness of our existence, that is to say there is momentum and a trajectory. At separate points along the path, everydayness has different definitions. Regardless of the difference between points, at any particular point the existence of a case of Dasein is influenced by a collective. It may be constantly changing, but there is always some way of being that is Dasein, and a familiarity of that way that individuals can adopt or reject. Singular existence comes about on the back of established contextual understanding, but its existence is its possibilities. Possibilities both solidifies the implication of momentum by a current location and assumption of a future location along the trajectory.

We are always being-in-the-world, and world always has worldliness, and from worldliness comes the sense of everydayness, from which its possibilities are determined. The overlying structure may be hidden, but confidence in the everyday persists nonetheless because we as a society lack attunement. “Attunement discloses Dasein not only in its thrownness and dependence on the world already disclosed within its being, it it itself the existential kind of being which it is continually surrendered to the “world” and lets itself be concerned by it in such a way that it, in a certain sense, evades its very self. The existential constitution of this evasion becomes clear in the phenomenon of entanglement” (Heidegger, 135). Our existence is defined by our understanding, which reveals our possibilities for modes of being. Realizing that our existence is dependent on the world and others prevents the evasion of attunement and reveal the truth that was covered by familiarity and routine. Changes in understanding changes our possibilities, which changes who we are. “As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities” (Heidegger, 141). Beings concerned with

being, have their existence elevated when they can contextualize such an existence. However this has some potentially negative implications for the systems of values that we may apply because they are now demonstrably conditional but as a society we make judgments in reference to values that are presented as unconditional. At the beginning one saw value in existence because it came from outside our world and granted individual independence by way of some absolute order. Now our reality has been demonstrated as entirely impermanent and codependent, so what happens to its perceived value?

Chapter 3 - Value Without Absolutes

The previous chapters have sought to question some of the principles of our experience from which we derive its perceived value, that have largely been accepted and overlooked in modern western society. The first task was to discredit the necessity for the special, separate,

non physical mind that accounts for one's experience and drives the actions of the body. Dennett's proposal of the multiple drafts model allowed for a strictly biological account of the self through evolutionary development. This led to the realization that there can be no precise moment where the self comes into being, but rather it required a smearing of information over a period of time. The second chapter examined the presumption of the self's isolation from both its world and other minds that exist in a western worldview. The exploration into the dependency of a self's existence to its respective world demonstrated that in some ways being is bestowed upon one rather than brought forth from within, that all aspects of our being are conditional. This leaves one with the problem of a finite existence with no absolutes to provide guidance and meaning to our live.

Much of the inherent existential value we perceive in our own lives comes from the absolute and independent nature of the self's origin, but does a rejection of absolutes also inherently negate the possibility for value in existence? Such an understanding can quickly spiral into existential nihilism. I personally believe that the series of Rick and Morty serves as an investigation of this philosophical scenario. At first glance it seems to argue that value does indeed dissolve, however upon a closer look that may not be the only answer presented."What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer" (Nietzsche, 9). As Nietzsche looked upon the arc of humanity's history, he located its first trial when man was confronted with an uncertain existence. Rather than spiral into chaos, we anchored ourselves to the idea of God as an absolute, a source of truth, generating laws of morality within an ordered universe of specific design by which one can define their observably finite lives. Values of good and bad were created and began the development of our existential understanding. In an attempt to realize these ideals mankind reached the age of

enlightenment, yet the values of goodness, truth, and knowledge that drove us there had unintentionally destabilized the notion of the absolute itself. By marching forward in the name of a universal we are faced with increasing evidence that nothing of the sort can be compatible with our understanding of existence. God is dead, and we killed him.

By Nietzsche's assessment we were set up for failure since the beginning, now the foundation of our entire approach to life has faded away but the full effects are yet to come. As Nietzsche puts it we are still living in God's shadow and will be for some time. However, there will come a day when we will be outside the eclipse and have no choice but to face the light, at which point we are the most susceptible to succumbing to nihilism (*Gay Science,* 108). This emergence from the shadow is explored in a unique manner by the show by attempting to disassemble everything we know to be true right in front of us.. At its commencement, the main character, Morty, is an average everyday high school student. His life is average everydayness at its peak, in the Heideggerian sense, that he is so entrenched in his operations in the world that he never looks to the greater system set in place. The cover of this routine is quickly stripped away by his grandfather, Rick, who never hesitates to demolish institutions of comfort. Rick serves as a lens through which the entirety of one's being has its true significance scrutinized. He is the corrosive agent of nihilism that Nietzsche warned could dissolve society. *Rick and Morty*'s science fiction element of technological advancements is used as a tool to force the general public to confront this death of God. Morty serves as a placeholder for the societal assumptions. By challenging his values and undermining his beliefs on their adventures Rick forces the audience to do the same. Face to face with the universe's indifference, one must come to terms with the seemingly baseless nature of their own existence.

Functionally, Rick's intelligence leaves him operating as an omnipotent being, but despite this he is committed to the narrative that existence is lacking value. Throughout the show he wastes no time denying existence of a god in the traditional sense as a deity, and as an absolute concept, and even goes as far as saying that if such a being does exist it is him.

> "Just discovered a new element! Think you could do that Morty? You think anyone but me could do that, ever, in a billion years? Do you think if god existed, he could do it? The answer is no. If god exists, its f***ing me!" (S3Ep6)

Despite the abrasiveness of his delivery, within the show this does not seem to be an exaggeration of his ability. In one case he devises a contraption that bestows sentience to dogs to accelerate house training, to a point that they launch a successful takeover of society in his absence. In another episode he has a box with a button, that when pushed generates a being whose sole purpose is to accomplish the task you give them, at which point they cease to exist. On a separate occasion it is revealed that he has constructed an entire mini-universe with sentient beings who have evolved and developed into a modernized society. He created this for the sole purpose of siphoning most of the energy they create to power the battery of his ship. He can create life and alter the reality of one's existence effortlessly. He has advanced to a point that the mystery,wonder, and reverence towards of the defining aspects of humanity have been removed entirely.

As I see it, his pessimism comes from years of misadventures that have revealed the structure of the universe as a whole. Specifically, the disclosure of the multiplicity of infinite parallel universes coinciding in simultaneous existence, or a "multiverse". These universes can be accessed through a portal gun that Rick has created. This is confirmation of an existence plagued by a concept theorized by Nietzsche called eternal recurrence. Explained by Walter

Kaufmann, "for time is infinite, but the things in time, the concrete bodies, are finite. They may indeed disperse into the smallest particles; but these particles, the atoms, have their determinate number, and the number of the configurations that, all of themselves, are formed out of them is also determinate" (Kaufmann, 318). Without an immortal soul that may exist outside of the physical limitations of the universe, we are finite, material, beings drifting out into an endless void. Despite the incalculable multitude of particles in the universe, however one chooses to define them, logically there must be some number which can be said to be an accurate account of them all. This matter of limited quantity exists and interacts in an infinite environment of time. Even without the guidance of some creator eventually every possible combination will occur, at which point they will begin to occur again, ad infinitum. There is no particular meaning behind any combination of assembly, and one must now exist sentenced to an unending cycle of finitude.

This multiverse is first demonstrated in the show when the world is left uninhabitable after attempts to undo effects of a love elixir through genetic alteration turned the population into horrific monsters. With no other option Rick uses the portal gun to find another universe where a freak accident had killed them and they covertly take the place of these versions of themselves from this timeline before anyone notices. Even if the show were to end right there, Morty would be left with a drastically altered understanding of his own existence. He now knows that he is living in a multiverse which has unending universes occupied by other Morty's. He would know that there are infinite versions of himself living infinite versions of his life, some similar to his own while others are drastically different but none existing intentionally. He knows that this existence doesn't belong to him, but he can verify it with a corpse buried in the backyard. He witnessed death and saw the universe move on unimpeded. Travel within the multiverse is a

good demonstration of revealing the thrownness of the existence. The nature of one's existence is related to its environment, which has been shown to be an unmotivated assembly. He came to be as he was because of where he was, but he could have just as easily been any one of the infinite versions originated elsewhere, and comparison between the goodness or badness of any of these lives seems illogical because the standards are set by each universe's worldliness.

In one episode Rick gives members of the family goggles that allow you to see through the eyes of different versions of yourself currently living in different universes. Within minutes the family dynamic is strained and discontent is sown after they have tangible comparisons between what is currently and what could have potentially been had their universe arranged itself slightly differently. They are faced with the fact that they are subjected to suffering in a life they did not choose while there is simultaneously a version of themselves being treated to the fruits of their desire. Are they any less deserving? It would seem not. There is no significance to finding oneself living one life as opposed to another. Anguish arises when one confronts their nothingness as an insignificant random spot in the span of the infinite, and it can lead to a complete rejection of belief in any sort of absolute value because it is contingent on current circumstances. With the understanding that everything possible in the universe has effectively already happened, is happening, and will eventually happen again, almost anything within one's finite existence could be justified. In the western perspective it is not a far journey from eternal recurrence to moral nihilism.

Rick would present himself as a full representation of a moral nihilist. He is unwavering in the face of death and violence and spits in the face of anyone acting by means of proclaimed righteousness. At one point he sells a gun he created for arcade tokens, to an assassin who openly and happily admits he has "no code of ethics, I will kill anyone, anywhere...children, animals,

old people- doesn't matter, I just love killin'" (S2Ep2). Morty responds in horror and Rick dismisses him as having a "planetary mindset". If he doesn't sell the gun someone else, maybe even another version of himself, will. This lack of meaning only fuels a resentment of institutions that attempt to enforce their conception of right and wrong. In an uncaring universe it is a waste of energy to try and instill order on such chaos. He is so opposed to such institutions that his strongest struggle is with an interdimensional council of other Ricks. In an argument for validating commitment to meaninglessness he claims his complete rejection of authority makes him the "Rick-est Rick", that any who would participate is ignoring something known to be true. However, despite this dramatic exterior, when one looks closer it can be inferred that not even Rick actually believes what he is preaching.

If Rick had truly abandoned a desire for value his existence would likely be a peaceful one. Not simply in the sense of avoiding violence but an internal peace with the nature of reality resulting in an unburdened existence. Rick's life is far from that, noted through his severe alcoholism and emotional distress. He claims to have no attachment to his family, offering once to prove mathematically that his grandchildren were "pieces of sh*t", yet he remains in their lives despite his capacity to travel literally anywhere, perhaps because he realizes that anywhere he goes is just as erratic and unsatisfying as his current situation. He realizes there is no order and has come to what Albert Camus labels the only important philosophical question in the wake such a revelation, that of suicide. "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and I refuse suicide. I know, to be sure, the dull resonance that vibrates throughout these days. Yet I have but a word to say: that it is necessary" (Camus, 22). Camus believes that one must embrace the absurdity of the existence that they are

presented with. You can try to fight it, ignore it, try to avoid it and regardless you'll end up dead. Value comes when one engages in life in spite of the inevitability of death, although the path to acceptance is not clearly laid out.

Embracing the chaos must begin by letting go of the need for absolute universal truths as the only source of value. Non cognitivism is the belief that moral judgements are neither true nor false, which to many westerners demonstrates an incompatibility with the practice of ethics and support for nihilism. This is because inherent value has an all or nothing connotation, that if it is not there at the start it will never be. However, many eastern religions touch upon this concept of non cognitivism by approaching nothingness and impermanence as core components of one's existence with an understanding that does not promote cynicism, contempt, or rejection of such an existence. "If moral knowledge is possible, then there would have to be something about such that is simple unconditional and permanent. However, because all things, according to the Buddhist teaching of dependent co-origination, are compounded (not simple), conditioned (not unconditional) and impermanent (not permanent), it would be inconsistent for Buddhism to defend the cognitive standpoint that moral knowledge is possible" (Markowski, 231). In the Buddhist tradition, three concepts are key to the understanding and acceptance of non cognitivism; impermanence, suffering, and no-self. In some way, shape, or form Rick is clearly troubled with aspects of his own being but lacks the perspective to resolve it fully.

Codependent origination is a Buddhist concept that is actually mirrored somewhat in the Heideggerian concept of existence. As the Buddhists understand it, no phenomenon can stand alone as its own source, each and every one is reliant on some other phenomena. If all things require some form of other to exist, then can anything be said to have an essence that is entirely its own? No, as such all things are lacking any sort of individuating essences, they are empty.

Though the emptiness is not made explicit, codependency is highlighted by Heidegger's being-in-the-world. One exists only in relation to the worldliness established by the *they*. Given the thrownness of existence the particularities of the *they* only exist in a certain manner because of the point in time in which *they* reside. "Daoists would add that our participation as reflective and interpretive human beings is quite special in that our conceptualization and understanding of reality are subject to interpretation and linguistic presentations pertaining to certain historical traditions. We are therefore not completely free to interpret things in any way we like, because neither nature nor our concepts and understanding are characterized by sheer arbitrariness" (Sigurðsson, 389). These serve as examples of a bundle theory of the self, in which a group of conditions collectively allow for the experience of selfhood to arise but none can stand alone to complete such a task or even be said to be the primary load bearer. The Mahayana school dismantles the bundle as form, consciousness, volition, thought and feelings. Personhood does not exist as its own entity with its own essence but is rather and illusory byproduct.

Even though the experience of self is not presented as an absolute reality, there is still room for judgement of proper actions. The Buddhist basis for morality, karma, literally translated means "causal action". Morality is not an individual activity, in which a person accumulates karma based on their actions to determine their future, because there is no actual self. Rather it accounts for the intersubjectivity of self-experience, "Buddhism contends that 'persons' are simply the totality of their karmic actions and the karmic actions of others. Persons are ultimately co-dependent nexus of causal behavior" (Markowski, 233). The experience of the one is intimately linked and as such a pluralistic account of morality is necessary. If one sees their existence as dependent on the existence of all others, their interests must also be your interests, generating the necessity for some form of morality. However it is not based in notions

of complete objectivity. In the Buddhist perspective there cannot be definitive moral knowledge but this does not prevent the possibility for moral experience, specifically because of the feelings component of personhood outlined in their bundle theory. It is a portion where the language used is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Moral statements do not claim an absolute essence associated with action but rather how one feels in relation to such an action. It must be noted that the feelings generating in response are codependent on the other aspects of the bundle of personhood, for better or worse.

In the hopes of arranging a perspective that minimizes suffering, Buddhism has an emphasis on wisdom and compassion. Wisdom of the whole is to provide knowledge for our everyday living in the world, compassion. Most suffering is a result of an impermanent entity searching for its essence. Buddhist wisdom is sourced in the knowledge of no-self and emptiness, yet the experience of the world through personhood has the contradictory appearance of things with essences. This appearance must be ignored because it would adversely affect one's feelings which can prevent moral actions. One must understand their true nature to know how to act correctly. "Quite simply, while wisdom can condition and influence our feelings about the world, compassion cannot affect or influence Buddhist wisdom….Thus, if one desires to understand Buddhism and thereby appropriate such into his/her everyday life, it is perhaps most skillful to proceed with an inquiry into epistemology and metaphysics than say morality and the teachings of compassion and loving kindness, for there is nothing we can know about the latter" (Markowski, 236). Morality is dependent on and conditioned by an understanding of the emptiness of the existence in the world, and arises as an experience by nature of the feelings component of the bundle of personhood. Morality is not objective or subjective in entirety but

actually situational, and each situation brings with it a plurality of potential, acceptable, responses.

Despite the lack of absolute principles, our existence is still filled by observable collections of prudential values that allow us to live well in the sense that our life would be noticeably lacking if one of these values were to fade away. In a western perspective James Griffin arranges a list of five such values; rights of human dignity, understanding of ourselves/world, interpersonal relationships, accomplishments/creative pursuits, enjoyment (Markowski, 237). Rick saw a lack of objectivity and only amplified his own suffering by committing to his attachment to a subjective reality. "Truth is therefore not something out there to be found or discovered-- but something to be created, designating a process, or rather a will to ceaseless overcoming: introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining, not a becoming-aware of something fixed and determined 'in itself'"(Sigurðsson, 389). Many western thinkers look out to the void and are unintentionally dragged into another dualistic view of the universe, between absolute essence and absence. Nagarjuna, credited as a founder of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, argues that even emptiness is empty. Rather than an absolute void we should look out and see the fullness of the woven tapestry of codependency that is only possible. We could only come to be as we are in such a framework and we should embrace it fully (Franklin, 88). The shows co-creator, Dan Harmon, was quoted in an interview saying, "We have this fleeting chance to participate in an illusion called 'I love my girlfriend, I love my dog.' How is that not better? Knowing the truth, which is that nothing matters, can actually save you in those moments… Once you get through that terrifying threshold of accepting that, then every place is the center of the universe and every moment is the most important moment and everything is the meaning of life."

This experience is all we have, and attempting to force into an ill-fitting label will only make our existence more unpleasant. It may not be what we thought it was, but that doesn't justify throwing it away entirely. Embracing the reality of our existence will enhance the value of our being, not sacrificing, but reallocating the source of our meaning. Doing this undoes the anxiety and dread that would arise otherwise and allows for the full realization of our potential. Cultivating our relationship with the world gives us an authentic means of self discovery which will only deepen our appreciation for what we have in front of us. As Morty summarizes so eloquently, "Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, everybody's gonna die. Come watch TV" (S1Ep8).

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Rick And Morty. Created by Dan Harmon, and Justin Roiland, Adult Swim.