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THE TIME TRAVELER'S MORALITY: ANALYZING THE COLLISION OF TIME AND ETHICS IN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Time and ethics, although at first glance have little to do with each other, are actually incredibly intertwined and complex. While the idea of a so called "objective" time might be comforting, compelling and even romantic, the search or desire for this concept of "real" or "actual" time is misguided and undesirable. By combining Edmund Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* and Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, this paper seeks to create a literary lens that will help uncover this interesting collision of time and ethics in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Chris Bachelder's *U.S.!* From there, the paper will see what this literature has to add to the discourse before concluding that subjective time is superior to objective time in allowing for a more interesting and dynamic view on human morality.

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Time and Ethics on a Collision Course

At a first glance, time and ethics don't seem to be too intertwined or even compatible in a meaningful synthetic analysis. Perhaps it can be said that time is a space where ethics is practiced, but that is really the only intersection of the two nebulous and often dynamic terms. But even that simple, rudimentary statement opens up some dialogue, first of which is examining the inverse. If we acknowledge that time is a prerequisite for morality to exist, consider the opposite: Must moral action be present for time to exist? Is there a moral statement in the way time is broken down? Experienced? Tampered with? Altered? With these questions, the focus of this paper begins to take shape, and the intersection, or even collision, of these two concepts becomes more and more apparent in empirical existence. In a modern age dominated and demarcated by technology, it has never been more appropriate to tackle how time and ethics affect one another. To examine these important and huge ideas, this paper will examine some inaccuracies with time and how they have anything to do with ethics before delving into the theories of Edmund Husserl and Søren Kierkegaard. Following that, the literature portion will test and illustrate these concepts with Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Chris Bachelder's *U.S.!* The paper will conclude by extolling the virtues and dangers of using a subjective time schematic, as opposed to an objective one, to develop moral decisions.

Before we get too deep in, let's get a working definition of time that will be used throughout the paper. Time is first of all a tool, like a rock bound to a stick or an inclined plane or an Allen wrench. Like other classically thought of tools, we use time to more skillfully interact with our environment. To use a comparison, it's like the discovery of the wheel, and how it lead to the development of more effective ways to move objects and do various other tasks. It allowed for more thorough interaction with our environment now that this barrier had been lowered; we were able to explore further, deeper and higher. After the wheel, we could move onto other problems now that transportation times had been reduced significantly. Similarly, time is a tool that allows us to interact with our environment. The whole time framework allows for important concepts like chronology and duration to take shape. Time is not, by contrast, a mythical imperative that contains a hidden truth. Like language or a hammer, time is just another important tool at our disposal to make our existences make more sense, so that instead of wandering around not having any idea what will happen next or when or if that thing will happen, we know that events (like night or day or a meeting) have beginnings, ends and duration. And this may sound simple, but it is important to make the distinction of the tool-ness of time. Humans aren't always great with processing time, but that does not mean it is floating somewhere above the scope of human mediation.

Objective time and subjective time are two other important terms that will be used a lot here on out, so it's crucial to define these as well. Objective time is the idea of time that exists independently of people. This is the "real" time that has always been and will continue to be. It is a more pure, primordial conception. Even if humans can't measure or conceive of it perfectly, it is there and never skips a beat. Subjective time, by contrast, is the time of the subject, or how time is mediated through humans. Because people are inevitably different, the way they view time will be different as well. Therefore, subjective time is dependent on the person who is interacting with it.

Before engaging the empirical evidence, we must de-deify this concept of "time." Time is often taken as a constant or perfect system that never fails. This of course is convenient in dealing with time, or else a late friend could reasonably argue that he fell into a tear in the fabric of time, causing his tardiness. But as silly as your friend would sound, time undeniably must be processed by a subject, as all things must. Time cannot be seen so it cannot simply be pointed to; it must be discussed and explained, and trying to explain something merely with another one of our tools, speech, makes the whole mess more abstract and confusing.

The argument could be made here that we have built the incredibly accurate atomic clock which only loses one second every thirty million years, so this must be objective time, or at least good enough (Major Boost). But this clock is still man-made, and as atomic clock engineers and proponents themselves will admit, not perfect. It seems close, but extended over an infinite period of time, the atomic clock would be infinite seconds away from "real" or "objective" time. So what is real time? When you consider the immense variation of time as displayed on personal time devices like watches, clocks and cell phones, the whole concept of time becomes more troubling. Time is a signifier to something that we just assume exists externally from us, and regardless of whether or not it does, it helps us make sense of the world.

There is a theorem normally applied in visual graphics called the "Uncanny Valley" that states as graphics improve to the point of reaching human-like realism, they paradoxically hit an asymptote where the human characters appear less human because the viewer begins noticing every defect in the almost perfect build:

> When an android, such as R2-D2 or C-3PO, barely looks human, we cut it a lot of slack. . . We don't care that it's only 50 percent humanlike. But when a robot becomes 99 percent lifelike—so close that it's almost real—we focus on the missing 1 percent. . . The once-cute robot now looks like an animated corpse. (Thompson)

The same can be applied to time. The closer we get to keeping "correct" time, the more obvious our mistakes become. Looking at the sun, we can probably guess the time within an hour or two, and in the middle of the forest, this is good enough. When a watch is involved though, suddenly someone running fifteen minutes late is an eternity.

Measuring times at the Olympics supports this trend. In the 1950 Olympic Games, a tenth of a second was good enough for recording track and field events. But recently, innovation in time keeping has made timing incredibly precise: "In response to concerns about the system's accuracy, the U.S. Olympic Committee's principal engineer Tom Westenburg developed the high-modulation, triply-redundant system in current use, which is accurate to less than half a millisecond" (White). That's a shift from 0.1 to 0.0005 seconds, or roughly a thousand times more accurate in sixty years. The closer we get to quantifying time perfectly, the more we notice the failures of time all around us.

In fact, time is far from perfect when we take it off its pedestal and look at it as a subjective experience instead of objective fact. Time, seemingly, is life's own little enigma, the magnum opus of imperfection. It exists as a variable and a dimension but yet unlike something like length or weight it can be perceived in different durations, even when the actual duration is the same. And again, this is something that we need. How horrifying would that family road trip to Minnesota be without the use of an mp3 player, or cell phone or even a book? These tools bend our perception so that the crushing duration can be warped into a more manageable and shorter experienced time, either through the help of Kanye West or a chatty girlfriend or F. Scott Fitzgerald.

There is a famous scientific concept called the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which Stanford's Philosophy Department defines as: "Roughly speaking, the uncertainty principle states that one cannot assign exact simultaneous values to the position and momentum of a physical system. Rather, these quantities can only be determined with some characteristic 'uncertainties' that cannot become arbitrarily small simultaneously" (Uncertainty Principle). This line of thought is key to our discussion on time, with some slight modification: time's "momentum" will be its perceived passage, and its "position" will be its actual passage. Now imagine for a second that you are playing an intense game of table tennis. You then take a break and are astonished that you have been playing for two hours when you thought you were playing for at most a half an hour. Now imagine halfway through your table tennis game, someone instructed you to stare at your watch for the next hour. This second hour will feel longer, because your subjective time has been corralled to the more objective near-perfection of time keeping pieces. Thus, when you are experiencing time's "momentum" you cannot truly observe it's "position" as well.

Now a reasonable critique can be made here that it is in fact the opposite: only when you are observing time can you truly experience it because then it is uniform: a second is always one tick of the watch, give or take a negligible distant decimal point inaccuracy. But this would be to put too much emphasis on the human ingenuity of time keeping. At the risk of delving into endless pages of abstract discourse (assuming we haven't already), the question must be asked, "did time exist before someone was there to perceive it?" While that question is too grandiose for this paper, it highlights how humans had to delineate time, but how they delineated it was in no way pure or proper. It is true that the sun helps in being a fairly reliable time piece, but why sixty seconds to a minute? Sixty minutes to an hour? Seven days to a week? It's not even divisible into 365 days in the year. Why not a five day week? This may seem like quibbling, but the way humans have set up time has a profound effect on how we interact with time. But this is in no way to suggest that the way it is done now is "correct" or even "good." So when you break from your table tennis match to stare at a watch for an hour, you are also staring at thousands of years of human discourse, arguments, religion, politics and alteration of a concept that we are not really that good at conceptualizing. Why is that we always know when we have to eat to survive, but we don't know exactly what time it is, or can't wake ourselves up at an exact time without help from an alarm clock? And when it gets stretched out even longer, we get even worse. Think of a parent sending their oldest off to college saying, "He was just born yesterday. Where did the time go?"

Looking at the nature of time intervals uncovers some more odd bits about time. Let's look at one of the most popular intervals: the minute. The minute can be broken down into its little brother interval, the second. This seems hardly worth noting, like some circular deduction, answering "why is that duck brown?" with "because it has brown feathers." But continuing on shows how the conception of the present isn't as concrete as we may want it to be. The second can be shattered into a hundred equal centiseconds, a thousand milliseconds, and so on and so forth, being broken down into smaller and smaller intervals, ad infinitum. What this means is that the most accurate stopwatch, even if it can be accurate to let's say twenty digits, is inaccurate on the twenty first, or if not the twenty first, then the twenty second or twenty third etc. Even if we take human mechanics out of the equation, this temporal burp still exists.

To illustrate this point, it is helpful to look at one of Zeno's paradoxes, Achilles and the Tortoise. The basic plot is that Achilles (A) is racing a tortoise (T) which has been given head start:

> Suppose A moves at 10 times the speed of T, and T has a handicap of a given distance. Then, by the time A has covered that distance, T has covered a further 1/10th of it; and by the time A has covered that 1/10th, T has covered a further 1/100th, and so on ad infinitum. Therefore A can never overtake T. (Hinton 57)

Empirically, this makes no sense. Of course Achilles will overtake the tortoise eventually because he is faster. But looking at the paradox theoretically shows the interval nature of time. Imagine the tortoise as the "present" and the faster Achilles as the most complex supercomputer on the planet. If the present can keep being broken down into smaller and smaller intervals, can the present ever be reached? The abstract term of "2:00 PM" is a human signifier for this certain point that happens once every twenty four hours, and it should seem that no matter what we call it, there will always be one instant in between the sun going up and the sun going down that will *exactly* 2:00 PM. But exact to what digit? We can say 2:00 PM is when it is 2:00 x 10^{999} but even then, what if we go one digit more? As a time interval is broken down an infinite number of times, the present ceases to exist, or at the very least is so insignificant and irrelevant that it's hardly worth noting. This plays into Edmund Husserl's idea of the time symphony that will be examined in a few pages which states that the present is simply a ringing of the moment before and anticipation of the moment immediately following.

More and more, it's looking like time is a suspect and shaky operator in life activities. With that under our belts, we can examine how ethics has anything to do with this. For the sake of sentence variation and conciseness, "ethics" and "morality" will be used more or less interchangeably. And now here are those empirical examples that were promised seemingly hours ago. With the rise of technology, interconnectedness and information, ethics and time have even more implications for each other. How many electronic devices do you own that update you automatically? A wife's birthday alert on a Gmail calendar, an RSS feed from your favorite blog, a text message reminder about a dentist appointment. These are all modern impacts on your time experience, and they do at first glance seem quite small and hardly worth throwing an ethical bone at. But also consider how much these tools help bosses or spouses or even friends to impact your subjective time experience, for better or for worse. There are a lot of people who aren't you that have a profound effect on how you experience time, and not all of them are people. The monolithic term "culture" also barrages your time experience without mercy. Think about the thirty minute lunch standard, or waiting three days to call that cute girl from the bar, or the nine to five work day, or even the very idea of the "weekend." With these outside actors influencing the way you plan and experience your time, there exists a moral implication. A significant other, for example, wields an amazing power over the other partner's time (think of all the women who were swept off their feet only to have

Prince Charming turn into a deadbeat, loveless man or vice verse), and therefore there exists a moral agency in his or her decisions (Nealon 51-82).

How is a system of morality even formed? Like any interesting question, the amount of available answers varies and is staggering in its volume. One thing that can be said with certainty is that what has been deemed "moral" has hardly been constant. As recently as 175 years ago, a samurai who brought shame to his family was expected to kill himself. This was the honorable and ethical thing to do (Honjo 591). Without engaging Western vs. Eastern schools of ethics which is another paper entirely, this self-sacrificial practice is today considered grisly, but a person looking back and calling samurais immoral animals would be at the very least offensive and over-simplistic. It doesn't even take these long blocks of time for these paradigm shifts to occur. Lobotomies (pacifying the deranged and violent so they could lead "normal" lives), withholding suffrage from women (protecting the weaker sex from the stress of political efficacy) and slavery (introducing Christianity to heathen Africans) were all seen as moral actions and accepted in society at one point, and relatively recently. In this way, it is not a big jump to say that morality and culture are closely tied.

The term "time travel ethics" immediately begets a host of barroom hypotheticals like "if you travel to the time of Socrates and sneeze, will it set off a series of chain events so that in the altered Socratic cough time continuum you are never born?" This paper seeks not to engage these in any meaningful way. As impossible as it sounds, the aim is far more abstract than this already ludicrous example, as time travel here designates not a Hollywood depiction of a buzzing, glowing capsule or a mad scientist hell bent on killing Hitler but rather the way the subject traverses the bumpy time continuum and the ethical implications of how that journey is charted, changed and ultimately taken. With a keen eye to the philosophies of Husserl in the time realm and Kierkegaard in the ethics realm, we'll arrive at a more applicable and concrete manifestation of how ethics influences time and vice verse, even if that conclusion in some ways returns us back to the beginning or proliferates the questions that need to be considered.

This paper seeks to expose this time/ethics tag team in everyday interaction and bring awareness to how they operate in everyday life. But the conclusion is not simply "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (although still grand advice); this paper delves further from these examinations into how differing, or even aberrant, subjective time can help us establish a more moral outlook. And this will be accomplished by looking at *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut and *U.S.!* by Chris Bachleder, and it begins with a simplistic yet elegant quote—the Homeric Helen equivalent in this paper, the quote that launched a thousand sentences:

LISTEN:

Billy Pilgrim has become unstuck in time. (Vonnegut 22)

Philosophy Choices

But, as is quickly becoming precedent in this paper, we first turn to theory to get us facing the right direction when analyzing the literature. This section will take two parts: the first will be about time exclusively, dealing with Edmund Husserl's important work *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. Husserl's work is especially pertinent because it deals with phenomenological aspect of time, or how time appears to the subject. This is quite fitting in the sense that Husserl also delineates from simply accepting "objective" time. Søren Kierkegaard will head the second part of the theory portion, his mastery coming in the field of ethics. Kierkegaard's views on ethics, as presented in *Fear and Trembling*, are fascinating because they do not presuppose any specific temporal situation, so the reader is not stuck with archaic eighteenth century truisms or new-age thought. Both philosophers open many areas of interesting discourse which will flow nicely into the section on literature and onto the conclusion. But before too much is given away, we begin with Edmund Husserl.

A Discussion of Edmund Husserl

Edmund Husserl developed the idea of phenomenology, or that things must be interpreted, and these interpretations are only representations of the actual object. Time is one such object:

> In truth, space and reality are not transcendent in a mystical sense. They are not "things in themselves" but just phenomenal space, phenomenal spatio-temporal reality, the appearing spatial form, the appearing temporal form. None of these are lived experiences. And the nexuses of order which are to be found in lived experiences as true immanences are not to be encountered in the empirical Objective order. They do not fit into this order. (Husserl 25)

Here Husserl is saying that concepts like time do not exist in a perfect, omnipotent order, but rather exist in this "phenomenal space" where a consciousness will interact with them and perception will ensue. Husserl argues that humans have an internal time consciousness which allows us to understand both the idea of the objective and mediate between our own and other's subjective times. "We must distinguish at all times: consciousness (flux), appearance (immanent Object), and transcendent object (if it is not the primary content of an immanent Object). Not all consciousness has reference to the Objectively (i.e. transcendently) temporal" (Husserl 101). The combination of these three understandings about time allows us to interact with it in daily life without having to constantly be conscious that we are doing so.

Another interesting concept put forth by Husserl is his time/symphony analogy. It can be tempting to assume that time merely appears as a series of unending present moments, and that memory allows us to remember previous present moments—even the act of remembering the past happens in the present. But this is problematic in Husserlian logic. If time is made up of flashbulb "nows," how can there be any sense of fluidity? Or recall? Even saying the word "now" in an attempt to demarcate the present is already invariably in past. Everything, including a thought, takes time, so by the time our synapse has fired the part of the brain that conceptualizes what it means to be in the present, the present is already the past. Husserl puts it nicely in his allegory of the symphony:

> When, for example, a melody sounds, the individual notes do not completely disappear when the stimulus or the action of the nerve excited by them comes to an end. When the new note sounds, the one just preceding it does not disappear without a trace; otherwise, we should be incapable of observing the relations between notes which follow one another (Husserl 30).

Husserl uses the example of a piece of chalk to illustrate this theoretical construct. He proposes that if one looks at a piece of chalk, closes her eyes, then opens them again, it's the same piece of chalk, only the temporal space has shifted. The reason she can identify the piece of chalk as the same piece before closing her eyes is because of time's symphony-like relation. The pre-blink piece of chalk is the note still sounding while she observes the post-blink piece of chalk, and the staying power of the piece of chalk that will be there when she opens her eyes is the future note that is being prepared for (Husserl 26-27). As discussed with intervals earlier in this paper, each time it is attempted to definitively label a note as the present, it can be broken down further into the influences of the past and future notes right next to it. There is no exact present but simply a junction of the past and future notes of the symphony. Also influencing her perception of the piece of chalk are the cultural implications of chalk: how she's seen it used, images of dusty classrooms, the embarrassment of a piece breaking while working out a proof in ninth grade geometry—these cultural and temporal perceptions go hand in hand and are omnipresent, even when looking at a simple piece of chalk. This may sounds basic ("well of course the previous image of the chalk helps us understand that it's the same piece of chalk"), but it is nonetheless important to our discourse, as is Kierkegaard's views on ethics.

A Discussion of Søren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's character Johannes *de silentio* takes the task of quantifying Abraham in Problema I of *Fear and Loathing*. The prose makes differentiation between the ethical/universal and the religious/absurd. Practicing the ethical leads one to become a tragic hero where the subject must deny the aesthetic, make a sacrifice, adhere to the universal and consequently be lauded by society. Practicing the religious leads one to become a Knight of Faith, who uses his faith in God to act outside the universal and thus paradoxically go beyond it. One must be a moral agent to be a Knight of Faith, and yet one must ignore their moral character when acting in faith, as morality and faith cannot be reconciled absolutely. This Leap of Faith requires the knight to disregard social norms for strange or even vitriolic reasons. The ethical is an incredible persuasive and pervasive force. It is much simpler and easier to follow the rules of the universal, because as they are ubiquitous across time and place—these sorts of actions can always be defended and are congratulated by others:

> [Tragic heroes] have heroically given up the loved one, and have only the outward deed to perform, then never a noble soul in the world will there be but sheds tears of sympathy for their pain, tears of admiration for their deed. (Kierkegaard 87)

In this way, the tragic hero can be understood. He did something he didn't want to do, but it was for the greater good. It's a cost benefit analysis: sacrificing the few for the good of the many. It's never easy, but it makes sense.

Destroying the singular self for the universal is the result of living an ethical life. Giving up the aesthetic and the self is arduous, hard and a real strain on the subject, which is why they are given the title of tragic hero: the move from subjectivity to objectivity is a tragedy. The individual is destroyed, just like Agamemnon chooses to kill his daughter, who is part of his subjectivity. Others won't feel the personal, emotional loss that Agamemnon must feel, but they will still reap the results of a Greek victory. This kind of sacrifice of the one for the good of the many is ubiquitous throughout time. To put in Kierkegaardian prose, "The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone, which can be put from another point of view by saying that it applies at every moment" (Kierkegaard 83). Living in the aesthetic assumes all benefits to the individual but at the cost of ethics. The more people living in the aesthetic the more unethical the society and the greater chance it has to completely break down.

The religious stage is so difficult because it requires destroying the self not for society but because God requires this destruction to prove faith:

> For faith is just this paradox, that the single individual is higher than the universal, though in such a way, be it noted, that the movement is repeated, that is, that, having been in the universal, the single individual now sets himself apart as the particular about the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is done for and faith has never existed in the world, just because it has always existed. (Kierkegaard 84)

When the knight of faith destroys her subjectivity, she is not rewarded with objectivity, with the universal. She is left with nothing but her faith. She is also left with uncertainty and doubt that only faith can solve. The Knight of Faith must act outside of societal norms because adhering to the objective is to adhere to universalism which is antithetical to faith. She is truly knighted when she gives up her subjectivity not to save her nation but for, to an outsider's perspective, nothing at all. Living outside the ethical causes the estrangement necessary to dedicate one's self to faith and be with God.

Another important aspect to take away is that the Knight of Faith must make a choice. She must choose to take the Leap of Faith, defy societal norms and follow the will of God. Kierkegaard places much importance on agency as a key to acting moral—the Tragic Hero likewise makes an incredibly difficult choice. More specifically, limiting the agency of others can be seen as being, in large part, immoral, because getting in someone's way to choose the path of the Knight of Faith can't be seen as moral. Kierkegaard further highlights this in another one of his books called *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, in which he advocates willing the "good," or motivating one's self in a way that can't be construed as seen for self-gain. This use of "will" further engrains agency, and the respect of other's agencies, in the idea of morality (Bloechl 915). We shall use Kierkegaard's ideas but repurpose and rename the terms to best serve our literary analysis, which begins directly below.

Literary Choices

As we enter this literature portion, the question naturally crops up, "why these novels?" While there is a staggering amount of literature printed in the English language, the choice of the two novels discussed below are very apt to this topic, and illuminate it dynamically and didactically. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is one the great American post-war novels. Its wit, brevity and irreverence have made it a part of American literature survey college courses and the piece de resistance of a rebellious high school book collection. Most importantly, Vonnegut's magnum opus deals with a protagonist jumbled by his service in World War Two and its profound effects on his position in time.

U.S.! by Chris Bachelder fits as both a great comparison and contrast to *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Unlike Vonnegut, Bachelder has not been imprinted on the American literary canon. Instead of dealing with a jilted character caught in the nightmares and triumphs of the war asserting American political and monetary dominance, *U.S.!* deals more with the contemporary America to which World War Two is a glorious but quickly fading memory. In this America, citizens try to reconcile the dream and values of the country with the realities that the very industries and situations that allowed the dream to flourish are no longer there, or at least have changed unrecognizably. With the protagonist of Upton Sinclair who inexplicably can be risen from the dead every time he is assassinated, the subjective time is brought in. How does it change when your formative years were one hundred years ago? Or being shot over and over again by a society that glamorizes and celebrates your assassins?

The morality aspects of both novels run high—*Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with "what have we done?" and *U.S.!* tackles "what do we do now?" And in both there is a character with an extremely abnormal relationship to time at the helm, directing both the time and ethical discourse, the first of whom is Billy Pilgrim, the slovenly protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Billy Pilgrim has interesting implications for subjective time in his own proclivity for being knocked around the time continuum and his interactions with the Tralfamadorians, an alien race that abducts Billy and sees time all at once as opposed to sequentially:

> "The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and the once a moment is gone it is gone forever. (Vonnegut 25)[1]

This is quite different from how time would be perceived on Earth, but Billy has a different relationship with time than Earthlings or Tralfamadorians in that he bounces back and forth in time constantly, borrowing both the Tralfamadorian sense of the past not being "gone forever" and the Earthling sense that time must be experienced (as opposed to seen all at once), even if it's out of order. This is where Husserl's concept of time as a symphony comes into play beautifully. The past and the future are always crashing into the present, so that no moment can be completely isolated. For Billy Pilgrim, this is simply magnified to an extreme degree. Billy's symphony is off key and off the rails.

[1] Unless noted, all other citations for this section are from *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut as listed in the works cited section

Billy's time travel is odd, because it doesn't conform to either extreme of two opposite classically-held time travel conceptions. The first conception is that a person will time travel but without the knowledge of the future or even the knowledge that he is time traveling, so his time-travel-tampering agency is reduced to zero. The second conception is the wily time traveler who goes back in time with full knowledge of the future and tries to change some act of history or accidentally upsets some future event with an errant cough in the Paleozoic Era. Billy defies both, because he has attributes of both. He has knowledge of the future, but like the Tralfamadorians, he accepts what will happen.

There is one crucial moment in the novel, however, where Billy is not traveling through time but instead remembers an event and recalls it from memory and not from the first hand experience of time travel. This is when he is in the hospital with Professor Rumfoord and is telling him what happened in Dresden. This is interesting in the sense that his memory has perfect recall, almost imperceptibly from an actual time travel: "[Billy] did not travel in time to the experience. He remembered it shimmeringly—as follows" (168). Professor Rumfoord and Billy are opposites. Rumfoord is seventy years old but "with had the body and spirit of a man half that age" (175) and a twenty three year old wife while middle-aged Billy acts like a man twice his age. Rumfoord can't comprehend that Billy has anything to offer as a weak pathetic person, so much so that he asks his wife "why don't they let him die?" (182). Even in this stark contrast, Billy does not feel the need to bolster his war story as he tells it Rumfoord. No one is aggrandized, no detail is omitted or added, and Billy makes himself out as the time traveling slob he was and always will be: "He asked Billy what it had been like, and Billy told him about the horses and the couple picnicking on the moon" (188-189). Instead of telling about bravely surviving the firebombing, he talks about horses and being arrested by the Russians, and concludes with "It was all right. Everything is all right and everybody has to do exactly what he does. I learned that on Tralfamadore" (189).

There are several potential explanations for Billy's time travel-like memory. The first is that Billy's time travels aren't time travels as all, but rather a coping mechanism for a man who can't deal with the harrowing capacity of humans to indiscriminately murder. The second is that he has simply experienced and re-experienced that moment in Dresden so many times through his unstuckness in time that he has perfect recall of all his life. Another would be that memory is, in some sense, time travel. If we can't truly trust time when it is happening, why trust memory even less? Billy already knows what will happen due to his ability to experience the future, so he has no need to tell macho war stories or compete with Rumfoord or really prove his self worth. Due to his aggregate cultural influence, these seem unimportant to Billy: "Billy was unconscious for two days after that, and he dreamed millions of things, some of them true. The true things were time-travel" (149). This passage suggests that the "true" images of the war are at best Billy's own impressions and interpretations, being that all of the "millions of things" take place within his own brain. And the ones that are true are these odd takes on war story retelling, where Billy is the weakling and details like tea cups and barbershop quartets take precedent over the firestorms and bravery. They contain truth because they are from Billy's strange moral outlook, even if it doesn't look like a normal "true" military account.

So like the estranged settlers sailing to a new world and the weary travelers on their way to Canterbury, Billy Pilgrim is on a pilgrimage of his own. He is the first to embrace the mysterious pantheon of subjective time, like those on the Mayflower awaiting the freezing and starvation in store from them in New England. Billy often appears as listless, pathetic, and seemingly without agency throughout the novel, over decades of incongruous times: "Weary kicked and shoved Billy for a quarter of a mile. . . 'Here he is, boys,' said Weary. ' He doesn't want to live, but he's gonna live anyway'" (45). But it's helpful to look again at the Tralfamadorians who see in four dimensions and view dead people only as "in bad condition in that particular moment, but that same person is just fine in plenty of other moments" (25-26). As the first explorer of this strange, subjective time, Billy cannot be understood, much like how humans do not perceive other humans as the Tralfamadorians do.

Just as the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock were huddled and pathetic and completely misunderstood by the natives to the area (and vice verse), Billy Pilgrim is isolated by his time travel abilities, so he simply appears this way to all the characters in the novel bound to linear time, which is all of them except the Tralfamadorians and the movie star imprisoned on Tralfamadore with him, Montana Wildhack. In fact, on Tralfamadore with Wildhack is really the only point of the novel that Billy appears to be in control, masculine, and content. This is due to the fact that Tralfamadorians take both of the humans through a time warp so while they spend years in the alien zoo it is only a split second in earth terms. Contrasting Billy with his Earth wife ["He had already seen a lot of their marriage, thanks to time travel, knew that it was going to be at least bearable all the way" (114)] and Montana, his Tralfamadorian partner ["After she had been on

Tralfamadore for what would have been an Earthling week, she asked him shyly if he wouldn't sleep with her. Which he did. It was heavenly" (127)] shows the shift in Billy's character. This alien time allows different attributes of Billy's character to become apparent, while, from a linear time persepective, Billy is just a pathetic out of sorts man.

While the Tralfamadorians appear to have mastered time, it would be silly to put their conception of time as the most moral or even desirable way to deal with time. This is evidenced when they discuss their fellow Tralfamadorian who accidentally blows up the universe when testing a space ship engine: "He has *always* pressed it and always *will*. We *always* let him and we always *will* let him. The moment is *structured* that way" (111). So even in this fatalistic time, free will is still important. They would prefer to let him make a horrible, universe ending decision than trample on his free will to press the button. It is acknowledged that he could be potentially stopped because they are letting him do it. So it creates an interesting quandary where they are respecting his free will, but at the same time are letting him practice it, which seems antithetical to the whole idea. If a third party has to permit your freewill retroactively, then is it free? Even though the action is still yours, there has been an outside decision to allow that to still occur, which implies that the opposite decision could have potentially been an option which means the final choice is not in the "free willer" but with someone else completely.

In fact, the Tralfamadorians do everything they can to put off moral decisions, as shown in the following dialogue with Billy:

> "On other days we have wars as horrible as anything you've ever seen or read about. There isn't anything we can do about them, so we simply don't

> look at them. We ignore them. We spend eternity looking at pleasant moments—like today at the zoo. Isn't this a nice moment?"
>
> "Yes.
>
> "That's one thing Earthlings might learn to do, if they tried hard enough: Ignore the awful times, and concentrate on the good ones."
>
> "Um," said Billy Pilgrim. (111-112)

The Tralfamadorians, as shown in the previous paragraph, have a convoluted if not entirely inaccurate sense of free will, and their relation to time makes their morality even more problematic. If they are only focusing on the "pleasant" moments, it must be questioned how the Tralfamadorians ever had an unpleasant moment. If these creatures love pleasantness so much, it is only logical to assume that, during the actual passage of time, they had little free will to choose pleasantness (thus the horrible wars). But in the sense of seeing all time at once (which, according to the Tralfamadorians, must happen concurrently with its passage), they have great free will in selecting only the pleasant. This seems backwards to humans (as in, we can only choose in the actual moment but can't retroactively decide to forget something horrible), but its backwardness is what gives Billy this sense of morality that everyone laughs at, but is actually incredibly dynamic.

The complex relationship between time and ethics is even more so on Tralfamadore, as evidenced by when the Tralfamadorians try to explain written messages to Billy:

> There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once,

> they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. (84)

This seems to suggest that when everything happens at once, there is no lesson—things just happen. But it is also questionable that the Tralfamadorians find reading "surprising," as being masters of time they should know every surprise. This is a real issue with Tralfamadorian time/ethics. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, these pleasantness-seeking creatures don't care how much unpleasantness there is in the universe because they can just look at the things that are pleasant. That may be well and good, but it neglects all other subjects that perceive time a different way, thus showing the incredible power of the perception of time on well-being and living ethically. Billy can't focus on the pleasant when he's in the zoo. He's bound to the human time construct of chronology, even as the Tralfamadorian tourists can select the most pleasant aspects of the zoo, or life in general. The turn here is that humans must then be bound to the same restrictions that have just been placed on the Tralfamadorians and be cognizant of how our perception of time affects others. This isn't to say we should be mindful of any potential aliens, but rather that time is such a dynamic perception and has so much variance throughout organic life that assuming it continues to work exclusively the way it does through your eyes can lead to amoral decisions. Billy is able to aggregate his Tralfamadorian culture and Earth culture to realize the importance of this.

The bottom line, with Kierkegaard in mind, is that morality requires agency, a choice. The Tralfamadorians limit the agency of those experiencing the unpleasant because no one focuses on those times because they are not pleasant, meaning that whatever happened then is irrelevant because it is not happy enough. It could have been war, famine, disease or natural disaster, but it all remains a black box of negativity that the Tralfamadorians, with their omnipotence over time, choose to ignore. By doing so, they have made a moral decision to pass the free will buck to the overall expanse of time that only they can see continuously instead of engaging morality in the passage of time. This is their cultural baseline for time, and it has useful and negative things about it, as does culturally construed time on Earth which looks quite different. The Tralfamadorians experience time like the seven year old who declares that he is going to watch cartoons and drink soda for the rest of his life. Can we know what happiness is without sadness? Rejecting sadness makes us lose touch with what happiness is or means and leads to immorality, even in the name of "pleasantness." For example, they keep Billy in a zoo and while he isn't abused, his ability to move around, or interact with other human beings (other than Wildhack) is extremely restricted. He only misses a second on earth due to the time warp they take him through, but again, with subjective time only the perception is really relevant, so they have Billy imprisoned for years in his perception. The Tralfamadorians act as though their system is fine and ethical, and to them it probably is. But think about how we assume that the way we experience time is just as fine and ethical. When we begin to question this, we can step outside this time construct and approach ethics from a new angle.

A lot can be said about whether or not Billy Pilrgim has agency. From the first outlook, it appears that he has none: Ronald Weary has to drag him along when behind enemy lines, complacency would be too generous to describe his career as an optometrist, and these time travels come and go whimsically, forcing Billy to go whichever direction they choose without consideration or input from the weary Pilgrim. This last aspect appears most comically when he is waiting to get abducted by aliens and watches a movie about World War Two bombers, then enters a time warp that replays the same film backwards: “The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes” (71). But despite this mounting evidence, it would be shortsighted and inaccurate to write off Billy as being without agency. Once again, Billy’s agency comes from his strange relationship to time. Because of his unique circumstances, Billy’s access to future and past times allows him to express his agency through his unique moral outlook.

So in Kierkegaard’s framework, where does Billy land? Perhaps a new term is in order to reflect the updated ideas, and here it is: “the Knight of Subjectivity.” The Knight of Faith can’t explain himself because he is listening to the higher power, the perfect, holy power. Because humans aren’t perfect, the holy order seems to be immoral to those living in the universal. But the holy order always was, is and will be perfect morality. However, with all of these assumptions, this holy will by definition cannot have agency. The holy will always makes the most moral decision, without fail. Therefore the holly will can’t make decisions because the decisions are being made by an external force (the morality present in the situation, which the holy will *must* take). The Knight of Subjectivity lives his life according to the idea that imperfection and subjectivity provides for different moral outlooks, and that the proliferation of morality is by definition more moral.

Thus Billy Pilgrim is a moral agent and a Knight of Subjectivity. Billy is cut down by seemingly every character in the novel because, like the Knight of Faith, they can’t understand his actions because his life is governed by imperfection, and he has given himself to it. Billy gets dragged around, knocked down and hassled by almost every other character in the book. But his unique moral outlook, which is humorous at times, poignant at others, is undeniable. He doesn’t trash the war or the soldiers or call for reform, because these are all activities most permissible in the objective culture. By rejecting them, Billy expresses his agency through his unique moral outlook that is still governed by culture, but it is a culture different than that of objective time because it is aggregated across time and space (the other space being Tralfamadore). Billy’s weird actions show that objective time has a tendency to mechanically decide what should be moral (like firebombing Dresden, for example), which can be good at times and bad at others. And if objective time is imperfect, the best critique will always come from the Knight of Subjectivity.

Chris Bachelder's *U.S.!*

As a point of comparison and contrast, we now turn to look at a fictionalized version of Upton Sinclair, who in Chris Bachelder's novel *U.S.!* can be dug up and brought back to life after every time he is killed.

Upton Sinclair is likewise a time traveler, but his idiosyncratic relation to time is not as fluctuating as Billy's; it is instead due to his ability to come back to life. This allows Sinclair to become a super example of the culture-inducing morality that was discussed earlier. Like Billy, Sinclair can't be understood by the modern era, as exemplified in this review for one of Sinclair's "modern" books:

> Sinclair proves himself, on nearly every page, to be woefully out of touch with contemporary culture, as when he calls a fax machine a "Telepaper Device" or when he describes one of the vehicles in a high-speed chase as a "Vanette," which this reviewer can only surmise to be a minivan. . .This oblivion is perhaps to be expected from an ancient writer who has recently been dead. . . (Bachelder 15)[2]

Perhaps Sinclair's biggest disillusionment is his unbreakable zeal for perpetrating socialism in the United States, which in the Post Great Depression has dwindled to the state of being a swear word. In this alternate history, his assassins, like Huntley, have become celebrities: "[Huntley] is by far the most recognized Sinclair assassin internationally. He receives thousands of fan letters every day" (151). This assassin fervor means that literally every public interaction is a potential deadly one for Sinclair,

[2] Unless noted, all other citations for this section are from *U.S.!* by Chris Bachelder as listed in the works cited section

and yet he cluelessly inserts himself into as many public settings as possible, as evidenced throughout the book but most dramatically at the conclusion of the novel (more on that later). At a Class of 1989 high school commencement, Sinclair cheerfully steps up to the podium: “He catches his breath and looks out at the audience once more. These faces are the faces he saw in California in ‘34” (23). But they aren’t the faces, because the world is no longer 1934 California, and minutes later he is shot and killed by someone in the crowd: “Someone shouts yells out, ‘Commie!’ . . . The shot is deafening in the cavernous gym. It is not a sound you ever get used to” (24). How could Sinclair have been so wrong?

Sinclair represents the ultimate puritan: he doesn’t drink, have sex, eat sweets, spend money on anything extraneous to the socialist cause, or care for art that doesn’t send a heavy-handed obvious message as his books do. As he tells his folk singer son, in parable form, via a letter: “He thinks no more of art for art’s sake than a man on a sinking ship thinks of painting a beautiful picture in his cabin. He thinks only of getting ashore. When we get ashore, then there will be time for your clever art” (116-117). On paper, these characteristics make for the ultimate political machine, but in reality it makes Sinclair a dopy, doe-eyed, out-of-touch old man. Indeed, all his personal proprieties erode at some point in the novel: he gets drunk with a man that wants to kill him, sleeps with a woman he barely knows, gets addicted to sweets, and never once spends time with the son that desperately wants to connect to his father. In his quest to bring a morality to the opportunistic capitalist system that rewards the rich on the backs of the poor, he overdoes it and becomes a bumbling caricature because he is stuck in the culture of his original life, but doomed to be dug up and preach the socialist word as long as there are leftists with shovels that need a hero.

Upton Sinclair's actual existence in history and his fictionalized portrayal in *U.S.!* provide an interesting look at how history and time relate. History, although just another aspect of life that seems objective and set in stone, can be as dynamic as livable time: "One might suggest that history cannot be flawed. It can only narrated in a more less convincing fashion" (108). This passage from a conversation between Sinclair and another author shows how sequential time espouses this kind of false-objectivity. To suggest that history is decided by those who narrate it in a more convincing fashion undercuts the idea that historic time is definite. We inevitably leave the actual perception of time in 1945 up to the people that lived in 1945, and then the interpretation is clumsily put together by competing interests and differing views. And even then, the illiterate or subjugated are left out of the discussion so what remains is a flimsy narrative that somewhat resembles the events that actually took place. Depending on what pedagogical lens is in vogue, history can change considerably. But it all harks back to the fact that time is perceptive, and time sixty years ago was undeniably only perceived by people alive then. And even if they are still alive today, the culture they've lived through since then has impacted and morphed the way they perceive their previous perceptions (Nealon 95-108).

In the case of Sinclair, he has two problems with time: He remembers a time in the United States where industry made everything, and it was before the government knew how to regulate it, so the worker was oppressed. After legislation, these problems were addressed (but completely fixed is of course a different matter), and the consciousness of America as the iron smelting underdog changed to the economic boom victors. One of Sinclair's secretaries articulates this point after Sinclair proclaims that the rest of the twentieth century must be one of progress because the alternative is too horrible: "Me, I'm betting on the horrible alternative. All my money is on the horrible alternative. The horrible alternative is undefeated. What is history if not a long dynasty of the horrible alternative?" (57). With his ability to be brought back from the dead, Sinclair can no longer relate the time consciousness that the culture of his era allowed to exist. So while the ideas Sinclair wants to pursue may still be intact, they are no longer able to be discussed or implemented in the same manner now that time has changed. But Sinclair's time-culture has not changed. His second problem is that he himself has unavoidably also been distanced from the very time conceptions that he put himself through during the socialist struggle during his first life span.

The cultural aspect of time is very apparent in *U.S.!* Sinclair operated, during his heyday (his actual biological life) in a culture that was more conducive to the socialist message due to a number of factors including the deplorable working conditions in factories because industry was evolving faster than the government knew how to regulate it. Capped by the Great Depression, socialism had many a sympathetic ear as evidenced when Sinclair says "I was twenty-seven years old when *The Jungle* was published. You need to understand. One day I was an unknown hack and the next day I was international celebrity. . . I was a hack, then a huge star, then a hack again. In one lifetime! How can that be? (187). But after the Cold War and the epic fight against the godless communists, this changes significantly. After World War Two, the United States enters an era of incredible prosperity as opposed to the crushing depression it had been experiencing prewar. Coupled with the vilification of communist countries hell bent on destroying capitalism and the American way of life, the American dialogue changed the way socialism was viewed in the country. It wasn't an overnight shift, but rather a broad cultural shift over several decades. As Sinclair puts it, "Nobody talks about capitalism anymore. Nobody even mentions the word. Capitalism has always been killing people and starving people, but at least we used to be able to *name* it. . . You can't fight for an alternative when people don't even recognize the possibility of an alternative" (182).

As the novel deals with more contemporary America, the plot and Sinclair's plight change. While the anti-socialist rhetoric remains, the US no longer really has the workhorse industry it used to, as "Rust Belt" cities shrivel up into shells of their former might. Because the rhetoric lags behind the reality that not much is actually made in America anymore, people in the novel revert to anti-socialism as a way to express their nostalgia for the country the way it was. This is most evident in the last third of the book which deals with the narrative of Greenville and their socialist book burning celebration.

This section highlights both Sinclair's and the citizens of Greenville's troubles in dealing with the culturally imprinted time that they are inhabiting. One sentence manages to illuminate both sides: "An assassin with extortionate child support payments took a shot at Sinclair and missed" (288). Despite being locked in a basement for being a socialist, Sinclair escapes to give his speech to what he thought was a socialist rally, but he realizes is a socialist book burning. He stands on the field getting shot at, but he stands there anyway, talking to people who hate him. But the group of assassins trying to get famous and rich by killing Sinclair tells the other side. One of the assassins has incredibly high child support payments which is a byproduct of the capitalist judicial system, and yet he funnels his frustration into killing an old man who is hopeless in his quest to start a socialist revolution. This point is more apparent at a Greenville Anti-Socialist League meeting when they discuss the state of their book burning chair, Miles: “Miles was a housepainter in town who had fallen off a roof in April and broken both of his legs. He was at home recuperating and. . .not doing well at all. The hospital bills were piling up” (209). Even though he is suffering the brunt of capitalist health care that he can no longer afford being unable to work, he is still fervently anti-socialist. This is part of the compelling nature of the cultural time system.

This relates back to our discussion on time and ethics by showing how powerful culture is in determining ethics. It also shows that Sinclair, who was raised in a different cultural time is out of touch but also how ethics and time can mix together to create the conundrums and seeming contradictions like the dogmatic anti-socialist who is getting slammed by the capitalist system. In short, neither of these above examples makes any sense. So the problem remains that if time is so variable, how can we develop an ethical system? This problem is where Upton Sinclair and Billy Pilgrim show their different moral outlooks, and where Billy’s moral system, interestingly enough, proves more desirable to Sinclair’s.

Conclusion

Upton Sinclair cannot attain the moral legitimacy that Billy Pilgrim has because although he is able to subvert "normal" time, he still experiences it chronologically. This chronology also means the he experiences culture chronologically too, and this is one of the main forces in perpetuating the normative morality system. Upton is bound to this all-encompassing system, and while there are interesting ways to work within this monolithic cultural system, Upton seems to be avoiding most of those. His perseverance is to be admired, but his stubbornness; blindness; and reckless endangerment of his and his secretary's lives are not to be. And in the end, Sinclair devolves to an old man who wants nothing more than just one positive novel review and tells a sympathetic young kid at the end of the novel, "Oh to hell with shovels boy. Get yourself a gun" (Bachelder 294). Sinclair uses his agency like crazy, always trying to change the system even with no hope at all. Billy Pilgrim seems to not care about changing the system, perhaps evidenced most succinctly with the "so it goes" peppered throughout the novel after death is discussed.

The "monolithic cultural system" discussed in the previous paragraph sounds like an evil villain from a dystopian apocalypse movie, but slamming this system is not the intent of this paper. This system of morals helps people live in a society that isn't completely lawless, and allows for interesting ideas and activities to occur. The point of discussing this subjective time view toward ethics is to show that oftentimes this huge culture ethics machine fails precisely because everyone is bound to it, so it is often hard to get a look at it from another angle. This is how awarding medals for killing people or blowing up cities comes to pass. If you really look at this, it doesn't make any sense. If morality and agency go hand in hand, wouldn't destroying someone else's ability to act (i.e. killing them) be bad, not to mention not worthy of accommodation? This isn't to make the point that all soldiers are murderers or any diatribe like that. Soldiers, like a brewer or lawyer or barista, all serve roles in this cultural system. If war makes sense to us, it's because the collective cultural logic says it does. This logic resists change because it is so abstract. And while the ethics that it endows may often be sound, there are many occasions where they are suspect too.

Billy Pilgrim is subjected to different culture rapidly and continuously throughout the novel. It may be tempting to suggest that Billy's special time travel perspective gives him an outsider view, that he is somehow above the culture subjection that all of his poor, linear companions are inevitably bound to. This, however, is inaccurate because simply interacting with settings and characters and providing commentary on events is a cultural and social operation. Billy is bound to culture, but because of his atypical temporal path, he is bound to a different culture all together. It is impossible for him to know where he is headed next, but because he retains a consciousness above the time travel and therefore can remember everywhere he has time traveled before, these cultures are aggregated, compounded, and formed into this new culture all on its own, just as the whole is always different than simply the sum of its parts. As stated above, a new culture naturally begets a new morality. Billy's culture is more moral precisely because it makes less sense. In the world that the other characters operate in, entire cities are set on fire and over one hundred thousand killed by tiny little canisters dropped from planes. Men are given medals for this, and the social fabric rationalizes it as a necessary action to preserve peace, and in doing so everyone in the culture is bound to that, whether applauding or reacting against it or ignoring it or doing anything in between. All of these are still reactionary. But passive Billy does something different. Billy's actions can't make sense to people who live in the "firebombing as necessary" world. This goes back to the wonderful example quotes several pages earlier where Billy enters a time warp where he shoots an hour ahead and then travels backward where he watches a military film in reverse where the planes suck up the fire and put them into little bombs and then land backwards for engineers to disassemble the bombs and spread their materials deep underground. This is the Billy Pilgrim morality, the time traveler's morality.

The literary evidence for this rationale is strong, but there is empirical evidence as well. Consider how easy it is to rationalize anything when you can say "just one more hour, or just one more day, or one more week." How many members of organized crime say "just one more, then I'm out?" How many compulsive gamblers say "just one more hour at the table, and then I'm cashing out?" With linear time, it is easy to project moral quandaries in terms of linear pathways. "Just one more week" is a very set amount of time because it's small and manageable; everyone knows what a week feels like, even if weeks often feel longer or shorter. And because of this manageable length, it is easy, at the end of the week, to say "one more week" and defer a difficult moral decision for seven more days. Everything from quitting bad habits to quitting that mistress can be easily deferred and deferring on something immoral is the same as acknowledging the immoral in the affirmative, a tacit recognition. Billy's time travel completely breaks this up. Who would continue as a hit man even "for one more week" when they see that in two years a rival gang kills their entire family in revenge? Or who would keep smoking when in a flash they are shot to the future and see their twenty year old children weeping around their hospital bed?

So what's the prescription? What should be taken from this paper? The aim is certainly not to advocate a time bending quest of moral righteousness; there is no time machine schematic appended. Ultimately, it's a different way to look at time, and how it can be looked at it can influence the moral decision. And in the end, time must be looked at through this horribly skewed and cantankerous lens called subjective experience. Experiencing it is impossible without interpretation, and now you as the reader have a new way to interpret it, and while you perhaps can't so explicitly traverse time and space like Billy Pilgrim or be continually risen from the dead like Upton Sinclair, these more extreme fringe examples highlight the importance of effectively dealing with time in a moral manner.

Consider the ability to control another's subjective time as a dangerous weapon. Time is a capital that we are all forced to carry around, use to pay off debts, buy things we like, and, if this metaphor isn't too tiresome yet, occasionally exchange. Think about it. Even something like your body isn't necessarily inextricably your own property. You could be a slave or held and bound by kidnappers in a manner where your agency over your body is zero. But in these same examples, time, precisely because it must be interacted with, it is inextricably yours. This, however, does not mean that other actors can't impact your interactions and perceptions of time. No, in fact it means quite the opposite.

Anyone who has been strung along by a desirable man or woman has felt the wound of that subjective time weapon, and all of that time that could have been spent getting to know other interesting people becomes collateral damage. Similarly, if you are in a boss position and have the eager new employee working long hours in search of that promotion that he'll never get, or at least won't get for a long time, you have caused him a subjective time gunshot, a trauma of skewed reality. Time may be money but it is also so much more than that. That girl that left because of your long work hours or the guitar that never got learned or painting that never got painted can't be quantified in money. They are functions of time, and in certain situations other people can directly change your subjective time with or without your permission, and for better or worse. This is the ethical component. As Kierkegaard would ask, are you willing the good? It is inevitable that your interactions with other people will in some way alter their conception of time, but can it be included in moral agency?

An example of affecting someone's subjective time without their permission is the solitary confinement punishment in prison. The only reason this is seen as an effective (whether or not that is actually true is of course very suspect) course of action against unruly inmates hinges on the idea that reducing the subject's access to cultural signifiers of time (sunlight, human interaction, etc) will create this new subjective time experience that is to horrid that the inmate will never act out again upon being released. This means we can alter people's subjective time to cause a desired effect, which is scary and profound.

Subjective time is susceptible to abuses, so it might be tempting to go back over to objective time as being a guarantor of morality and logic. But what does objective time do for us? We can say it keeps our temporal lives in order, making sure trains run on time or appointments aren't missed or, even more generally, that without this idea of objective time we will be trapped in this hellish timescape where we will be unable to know when things start, end, or how long something will last. If everyone's time is subjective to themselves, nothing can be real because people can only interpret things through themselves, and the idea of other people dictating what time means is, to say the least, terrifying. Are we really just figuring time out as we go along? Getting "close enough?" Bouncing time off enough people and events until it gets to the point of something resembling livability where we don't have to constantly wonder about time? Perhaps these aren't even the most important questions. Something like "well, why is objective time so much more desirable?" might be more apropos. This move to get to some sort of state where time is uniform and ubiquitous is a fool's quest, and not worth anyone's, and please excuse this term, time.

As stated in the above pages, time cannot be corralled into a brain, ledger or time keeping device with perfect accuracy. What it comes down to is that there is no perfect timepiece; there is no record of what "actual" time it is right now. Humans have to negotiate with the signifier we call "time" and that is really as deep as the rabbit hole goes. But take a deep breath, because this is a positive thing. This isn’t to say objective time is useless or evil, but it is most useful as an idea, not a theoretical imperative. The idea of objective time helps us agree that a two hour movie will last two hours, and even though that may feel different to different people (especially when you factor in the countless variables like “when was the last you saw a movie? What’s the movie about? How much sleep did you get last night?”), the idea of objective time allows us to function and better understand each other's subjectivity (imaging having an argument about how long the movie actually was without the idea of objective time). To use a metaphor, objective time is Santa Claus. Even though he's not real, it's comforting to believe that a plump man traverses the glove giving good children presents. As long as objective time is realized as an idea and not fact or a lost relic that needs to be found and uncovered, it is a useful tool. When we enter a more subjective time that strays from the ubiquity of our atomic clocks, we are able to get different takes, outlooks and moral views.

Time is one of the big guns of the culture machine that changes how we view the world. The changing of life spans, work habits, typical marriage ages, expected child bearing ages—these all have profound impacts on how we view our time, and the forced ubiquity across the cultural demographic naturally begets some sort of relative pinhole ethics. To put it another way, the way culture forces us to negotiate with time forces the way we view what is ethical, often without us knowing or being cognizant of it. That is why when we can break free of this pretend objectivity, this false truth of planned time, we can offer up more interesting and ethical views. This Billy Pilgrim-type morality acts as an ombudsman to the culturally induced morality. This counterbalance can seem odd or apocryphal but that is only a testament to how powerful culture is in dictating how we see, plan and use our time and how that corrals our thoughts on what is ethical. This isn't a "fight the machine" kind of rhetoric; it is more of a call to peer behind the curtain, to see how the machinery is working, and how it is working on us. And when we can step outside the way we're expected to view time by culture's pretend objectivity, we can more ethically view the system as a whole.

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WORK EXPERIENCE:

Feb 11 – Present — **The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,** New York, NY
Production/General Intern
- Attend daily production meetings, help archive tape library, transcribe tapes for segments, and a multitude of other tasks

ACTIVITIES:

Sept 10 – Jan 11 — **University Post,** Copenhagen, Denmark
Reporter for English language newspaper
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Department of Undergraduate Education, University Park, PA
May 10 – August 10 — Summer Discovery Grant Recipient
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***Phroth*, Penn State's Humor Magazine**, University Park, PA
Apr 09 – May 10 — Head Writer
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HONORS AND AWARDS:

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