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Table of Contents

Religion

Becoming the Righteousness of God:

God's Communicative Purposes as a Basis for Consensus in Religious Epistemology

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Modern Christianity is in a state of epistemological discord. Although Christians agree God exists, different schools of Christian philosophy disagree as to the proper foundation for this belief or if foundation for this belief can even be communicated in rational terms. This division presents a problem because it will be difficult for the Church to convince non-believers its teachings are justified when the Church itself cannot agree as to why it believes what it does. Thus, philosophical work is needed to increase the lines of communication between epistemological schools within the church so that it is better able to accomplish intellectual ministry and avoid intellectual irrelevancy. I investigate Paul Moser's unique epistemological approach of volitional evidentialism in conjunction with two leading but divergent forms of religious epistemology, namely, reformed epistemology and natural theology. I argue that Moser's unique epistemological approach can bridge the gap between these major schools in Christian philosophy and provide a new epistemology that is rational, morally redemptive, and God-centered.

Introduction

The question of the proper foundation for human knowledge is foundational to any aspect of philosophy. Disagreement over the best answer to this question speaks directly to the seemingly irreconcilable plurality and discord that marks modern thinking. If we cannot agree on what the necessary and proper conditions to justify holding a proposition as "true" are, it is impossible to have a fruitful conversation as to whether or not a proposition meets the requirements necessary to be justified as true. The Church has not been unaffected by this modern epistemological discord. Although Christians agree God exists, different schools of Christian philosophy disagree as to the proper foundation for this belief or if foundation for this belief can even be communicated in rational terms. Thus, philosophical work is needed to increase the lines of communication between epistemological schools within the church so that it is better able to accomplish intellectual ministry and avoid intellectual irrelevancy. It will be difficult for the Church to convince non-believers its teachings are justified when the Church itself cannot agree as to why it believes what it does.

Although the differences between two leading schools of religious epistemology—natural theology and reformed epistemology—seem irreconcilable, new movements in the discipline offer tools to help bridge the impasse. More specifically, Loyola University philosopher Paul Moser bases his epistemological project off the question, *If a God who is worthy of worship exists, how would he reveal himself to us?* When one begins the task of searching for a proper foundation for belief in God with this question in mind, one can break down the main contributions of reformed epistemology and natural theology and find that they are, in fact, compatible. Moser's unique epistemological approach can bridge the gap between these major schools in Christian philosophy and provide a new epistemology that is rational, morally redemptive, and God-centered.

Natural Theology and the Objections of Reformed Epistemology

Natural theology has a remarkable influence on religious thinking. The arguments of natural theology appear as early as the 4th century BCE in Plato's *Timaeus* and are further developed by many of the most influential thinkers in the Western tradition. Enormously influential in the Catholic Church from Aquinas onwards, natural theology seeks to extrapolate evidence of an intelligent creator through reason and empirical observation without appealing to ecclesiastic authority or special revelation. In its modern Christian expression, natural theology typically is a two-step apologetic process which first provides arguments for the existence of a deity with some characteristics of the Judeo-Christian God and follows by arguing this deity has in fact revealed himself

through the special revelation of the Bible.[1] Natural theologians typically cite Psalms 10:9 and Romans 1:20 as evidence that their project is biblically justified in both its aim and method.[2]

Although natural theology continues to see support from the Catholic Church and some Protestant denominations, the Reformed tradition largely rejects natural theology based on the transcendent aspect of God's purposes and the inability of human reason to understand or accept those purposes due to the corrupting power of sin. Because Luther had so forcefully disputed the viability of human reason,[3] Calvin claims that if faith is to be strong, "we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit."[4] Nineteenth century Reformed theologian Hermann Bavinck heeds Calvin's advice, explaining, "the so-called proofs are by no means the final grounds of our most certain conviction that God exists. This certainty is established only by faith; i.e., by the spontaneous testimony which forces itself upon us from every side."[5] Elsewhere, he exemplifies Reformed thinking by emphasizing that Scripture does not posit God as the conclusion of an argument, but rather, "both religiously and theologically it proceeds from God as the starting point."[6]

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, reformed thinkers continue to reject natural theology on traditional grounds, arguing that non-belief is caused by sin's suppression of the universal disposition toward belief that God has placed in every human heart. Therefore, twenty-first century Reformed philosopher Nicolas Woldsterforff argues that reformed thinkers are right in seeking to remove obstacles to belief through defensive reasoning that bring personal factors of resistance to light rather than offering

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1 C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

2 See, for example: Garrett DeWeese, "Toward a Robust Natural Theology: A Reply to Paul K. Moser's 'Divine Hiding'." *Philosophia Christi* 3, no. 1. (2001), 113-117.

3 See: Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 67-68.

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill and translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book I, Chapter viii, section 4.

5 Hermann Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendricksen, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub Co., 1951), 78.

6 Ibid., 76.

the evidential proofs of natural theology.[7]

Recently, philosophers in the Reformed tradition have provided a more philosophically rigorous expression of Calvin's alternative to natural theology in the form of Plantinga's *Reformed Epistemology*. In this modern philosophical expression of Calvin's theology, Plantinga bolsters Calvin's critique of natural theology with sharp analytic reasoning by arguing:

> The reformers mean to say, fundamentally, that belief in God can properly be taken as *basic*. That is, a person is entirely within his epistemic rights, entirely rational, in believing in God, even if he has no argument for this belief and does not believe it on the basis of any other beliefs he holds. And in taking belief in God as properly basic, the reformers were implicitly rejecting a whole picture or way of looking at knowledge and rational belief; call it classical foundationalism.[8]

In other words, what the reformers were really trying to articulate in their rejection of natural theology was a more fundamental rejection of a form of classical foundationalism that says belief in God is not properly basic.

Classical foundationalism dictates that in order for a belief to be rational, it must logically proceed from more fundamental beliefs. Because arguments cannot be infinite, every rational belief must ultimately be based on a string of inferences that can be traced back to a properly basic proposition—one that is self-evident and incorrigible like "I seem to see a house," or "one plus one equals two." Reformed epistemologists accept foundationalism in the sense that a proposition is justified only insofar as it is logically supported by a properly basic foundation. They do not agree however, with a classic Thomist or Cartesian standard for properly basic beliefs, arguing that such a standard is self-defeating. The idea that a proposition must be self-evident and incorrigible to be true, they claim, is not itself self-evident or incorrigible.[9] Reformed epistemologists acknowledge that they cannot present an explicit alternative standard for properly basic beliefs, but they argue that belief in God should be taken as one.[10] Here one can see a potential weakness in Reformed thinking if it seeks to avoid fideism by maintaining that belief in God is rational, but this will need to be further developed later. First, we must examine the claims of Paul Moser.

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7 Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is Reason Enough?" In *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, edited by R. Douglas. Geivett and R. Douglas. Geivett, (New York u.a.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 146.

8 Alvin Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," In *Philosophical Knowledge*, 49-62, (Washington, DC: American Catholic Philosophical Assoc, 1980), 53.

9 Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" In *Contemporary Perspectives On Religious Epistemology*, edited by R. Douglas. Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, (New York u.a.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 135.

10 Ibid., 139.

Paul Moser's New Epistemological Approach

Although Paul Moser sees his project as distinct from both Reformed epistemology and natural theology, Moser upholds Reformed epistemologists in their critique of the conception of faith as an intellectual conclusion. However, he does so in a way that also leaves some room for the work of a revitalized form of natural theology. Moser argues that if we define God as a being who is worthy of worship (a being infinite in power, knowledge, and love), then such a being is by definition in epistemic authority over us.[11] In other words, this being would have the authority to choose how to reveal himself to us. Furthermore, if God is a morally perfect being, he could very likely have a specific teleological purpose in the way he reveals himself to us that does not necessarily cohere with the evidential requirements we would like to place upon him. Thus if one is to consider the question of God's existence in a fair and legitimate way, one needs to consider how a morally perfect God would chose to reveal himself to his creation if he did in fact exist.[12]

When this question is honestly asked, it becomes clear that a morally perfect being would chose to reveal himself to us in a very specific way. We as humans find ourselves marked by a state of imperfection, slipping so easily into selfish, prideful, lustful, and lazy behavior and only achieving even small acts of self-sacrifice with considerable effort; a morally perfect God would therefore, out of compassion, seek to non-coercively transform our character into one that is like his—perfect in self-giving *agapē* love. Therefore, Moser concludes that God would seek to produce "curative knowledge" rather than mere intellectual assent to his existence.[13] For Moser, such curative knowledge of God's existence could not be received without producing redemptive transformation in the heart of the human receiver. This leads Moser to cite 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 and Romans 5:5 as some of the most important epistemological statements in the Bible.[14] In Corinthians 2:4-5, Paul says, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom,

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11 Paul K. Moser, "God and Epistemic Authority," *Journal For Cultural And Religious Theory* 14, no. 2 (2015), 414.

12 Ibid., 415.

13 Ibid.

14 Paul K. Moser, "New Testament Apologetics, arguments, and the end of Christian Apologetics as we Know it," *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2, 388-389.

but on God's power."[15] Moser uses Romans 5:5 to identify the power Paul describes as "God's love [which] has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." He concludes, like Paul, that arguments cannot be the foundation for faith because they are not volitionally redemptive. In other words, receiving the evidence of an argument does not necessarily cause a change in one's choices, motivations, and character. Instead, God presents a volitional challenge to humans to receive and reflect his morally perfect *agapē* love, leaving behind our destructive motivational core of self-love and returning instead to fellowship with our creator. Of course, the evidence God provides is only confirmed when humans respond to God's volitional challenge and in turn experience the effects of God's *agapē* love as they receive "a new default motivational center," thus becoming "personifying evidence of God."[16]

Moser's Critique of Natural Theology

Moser's reoriented religious epistemology causes him to join Reformed epistemologists in their critique of traditional natural theology on several fronts. First, since "the presence of God's morally transformative love is the key *cognitive* foundation for filial knowledge of God,"[17] Moser argues that faith in God cannot be based on an argument. The mere *intellectual* change arguments might cause do not necessarily effect *moral* transformation in the heart of a believer, whereas the foundational evidence of a God who is worthy of worship would be volitionally challenging and morally redemptive.[18]

Second, like reformers, Moser emphasizes passages of Scripture that highlight God's transcendence and present his wisdom as countercurrent to that of the world.[19] Metaphysical proofs can contribute to human hubris by making the intellectual elite suppose that their rational contemplation is superior to God's redemptive calling to live a life of *eudaimonia* by dedicating it to service of God and others. God's wisdom, on the other hand, deflates pride, calling the prideful to forfeit self-love and recover proper relationships with God and other people in a way that arguments cannot.

Finally, Moser, like Plantinga, rejects

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15 All translations are from the NIV.

16 Paul K Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 209.

17 Paul K. Moser, "Man to Man with Warranted Christian Belief and Alvin Plantinga." *Philosophia Christi* 3, no. 2 (2001), 375.

18 Paul K. Moser, "New Testament Apologetics, arguments, and the End of Christian Apologetics as We Know It." *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015), 389.

19 Ibid., 388.

argumentism on philosophical grounds. Echoing the sentiments of Reformed epistemology, Moser argues that, "on pain of endless regress, arguments lack *ultimate,* or *foundational* evidential value."[20] Furthermore, Moser is not entirely satisfied with the empirical observations of natural theology as the proper foundation upon which to base arguments. Instead Moser bases his religious noetic structure, or system of knowing, off of the evidence of personal religious experience in a way that is reminiscent of the Reformed claim that God has placed knowledge of himself in every human heart.[21] Citing Paul, Moser argues that the "power of God" ought to be "the causal and epistemic basis for faith in him."[22] Again, it is God's morally transformative *agapē* love that is the key foundation for Moser's religious knowledge.

Limitations of Reformed Epistemology and the Superiority of Moser's Approach

While Moser preserves the main thrust of Reformed thinking, he also leaves behind its biggest difficulties, creating the potential for a broader epistemological approach that preserves room for natural theology. Plantinga says that he thinks in their rejection of natural theology, reformers were really trying to articulate a rejection of classical foundationalism.[23] I argue that Plantinga's impressive and momentous epistemological project is actually based on the legitimate critiques of lifeless manifestations of Thomist natural theology which Moser also articulates. I argue further that Plantinga's complete rejection of evidentialism is therefore unnecessary, and in fact, unwarranted.

Although Plantinga holds belief in God as properly basic, he does not think belief in God is irrational, and he vehemently rejects being labeled as a fideist.[24] Instead, he argues, "When reformers claim that this belief is properly basic, they do not mean to say, of course, that there are no justifying circumstances for it, or that it is in a sense groundless or gratuitous."[25] He goes on to affirm the Reformed belief that God has created humans with a disposition towards belief in him, leading one to think that if Plantinga himself did not experience this inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as *evidence* of

20 Paul K. Moser, "New Testament Apologetics, arguments, and the End of Christian Apologetics as We Know It." *Philosophia Christi* 17, no. 2 (2015), 395.

21 Ibid., 390.

22 Ibid., 389.

23 Plantinga, "The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology," 53.

24 Richard Askew, "On Fideism and Alvin Plantinga," *International Journal For Philosophy Of Religion* 23, no. 1 (1988), 3.

25 Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" 137.

God's existence, he would not consider belief in God to be rational. He cites Calvin, arguing that if one comes to belief in God, "upon beholding the starry heavens, or the splendid majesty of the mountains, or the intricate, articulate beauty of a tiny flower,"[26] one is completely justified in doing so even if she or he lacks any kind of implicit or explicit argument to support theistic belief. While such incredible natural phenomena are not arguments, Plantinga fails to recognize that they—or perhaps the feelings that they invoke—are still a form of *evidence* that God exists.

Moser does explicitly what Plantinga does implicitly; he rejects argumentism while holding onto a robust evidentialism of religious experience that becomes increasingly salient as the individual increasingly commits to receiving and reflecting it. Therefore, the case can be made that Plantinga's epistemology can be articulated more consistently as an evidentialist approach like Moser's—experiencing God's internal volitional challenge to receive and reflect his perfect *agapē* love is the foundational evidence that makes Christian belief rational.

In preserving a form of evidentialism, Moser avoids other difficulties Reformed thinkers face as well. In a response to Plantinga's book, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Moser argues that in rejecting arguments and evidentialism, Reformed epistemology lacks any tools with which to engage those who are not already inside the walls of the church.[27] Even if Christian belief ought not be based solely on arguments, Moser says, "we must still explain the *grounds* on which Christian belief is to be *recommended as true*… recommended beyond Sunday or Wednesday choir practice and church service, to non-Christians."[28] If belief in God is to be taken for granted without an evidential foundation, the church has nothing to say to those who choose not to take belief in God as properly basic. Because Moser is an evidentialist, on the other hand, he can formulate arguments from an evidential foundation to encourage non-Christians to receive the challenging, purposive evidence God has placed in their hearts.[29]

Even esteemed Reformed theologian B.B. Warfield recognized the insufficiency of a religious epistemology that disregards evidence. He argues that although faith is a moral act, it cannot sustain its confidence unless it has the evidential grounds to believe in the existence

26 Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" 137.

27 "Man to Man…," 170.

28 Ibid., 377.

29 See page 375 of "Man to Man with Alvin Plantinga" for what such an argument would look like.

of a God that one can choose to place her or his faith in.[30] Thus Warfield concludes:

> Mere reasoning cannot make a Christian; but that is not because faith is not the result of evidence, but because a dead soul cannot respond to evidence. The action of the Holy Spirit is not apart from evidence, but along with evidence; and in the first instance consists in preparing the soul for the reception of the evidence.[31]

Clearly, outright rejection of evidentialism is not a requirement of an interpretation of the Christian faith that takes the moral nature of faith seriously. Therefore, Reformed epistemologists would do well to abandon a complete rejection of classical foundationalism. Instead, they should opt for Moser's epistemology which is God-centered and morally redemptive while also leaving room for valuable conversations with those outside of the walls of the church.

Moser's Epistemological Project and a Revitalized Natural Theology

In Moser's critique of aspects of Reformed epistemology, one can see how there may be room for the benefit of a revitalized form of natural theology in his line of thinking because Moser considers it worthwhile to provide arguments that make God's redemptive calling more difficult to ignore. Admittedly, Moser himself seems to reject natural theology altogether on the grounds that any evidence God provides would require us to cooperate in his communicative purposes in order to receive it—namely abandoning our harmful drive to put love of self above true fulfillment through self-denying, compassionate relationships with God and others. Moser thinks that in providing intellectual arguments that are detached from a volitional challenge to forfeit one's egocentric motivational center, natural theology serves as an unnecessary distraction and obstruction from the convincing power of the gospel and of God's spirit.[32] However, if done correctly, the intellectual arguments of natural theology serve God's communicative purposes by making the inner moral testimony of his Spirit more difficult to suppress and ignore. Thus Moser is inconsistent in his complete rejection of natural theology.

Not only is Moser's epistemological project inconsistent if it rejects natural theology, it is also incomplete. The most substantial difficulty in defending Moser's volitional evidentialism comes from the fact that it is based off a somewhat ineffable personal experience. If one cannot immediately connect their experiences with the intuitive conviction of divine

30 B.B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 15.

31 Ibid.

32 Paul K. Moser, "A God Who Hides and Seeks," *Philosophia Christi* 3, no. 1, (2001), 123.

moral challenging Moser describes, his epistemological argument very quickly falls flat. Most individuals outside the church are in fact in this situation, not having recognized any personal experience they have had as a divine calling to forfeit self-destructive greed and receive instead a default volitional center of *agapē* love. Why? Because it is very difficult to recognize the voice of someone you do not believe exists. Thus without any place for natural theology, Moser's epistemology falls prey to the same critique he leveled against that of Plantinga's—it has little use for evangelism outside of the walls of the church because many do not recognize the foundational transformative evidence of God's calling Moser provides.

It will be helpful to use one of Moser's own analogies to illustrate this point. In explaining the purposive nature of God's moral rescuing, Moser compares divine salvation to the work of a lifeguard. The "evidence" of a lifeguard is inherently salvific and challenging. The lifeguard suggests she can rescue the swimmer, but only if the swimmer places her trust in the guard and willingly cooperates in the guard's project to save her. Thus, although the salvific power comes wholly from the lifeguard, the guard cannot succeed without cooperation of the drowning swimmer.[33]

Although some individuals, like the Apostle Paul, have such dramatic experiences of divine calling that they could be fairly compared to the arresting experience of a lifeguard's physical rescue, for many, God's salvific challenge is not so obvious. Hence the illustration ought to be altered accordingly. Instead of swimming out to the beach-goer who is approaching a rip current, suppose the lifeguard merely blows his whistle and beckons to the wayward beachgoer from his chair. Suppose further that the wayward beach-goer has never been to the beach before and has no understanding of rip currents nor familiarity with the concept of a lifeguard. Surely the beach-goer would not be able to interpret the lifeguard's whistle-blowing antics as a personal calling away from a self-destructive path toward a dangerous rip current. Perhaps the beach-goer may have a nagging suspicion the whistle-blowing individual high up in a red chair is trying to communicate, but the beach-goer could easily suppress or ignore this feeling. Wheaton philosopher Katharyn Waidler suggests many nonbelievers may likewise be unable to recognize the experiential evidential foundation Moser describes, arguing, "While *The Evidence for God* helpfully draws attention to the role of God's redemptive purposes in extending the authoritative call to sinful people, Moser's book doesn't directly address how one who does not know God in some respect recog-

33 See Paul Moser, *The Severity of God: Religion and Philosophy Reconceived*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 14-15.

nizes that call."[34] Although God's redemptive evidential calling is universal, many lack the cognitive context to adequately recognize and understand it as such due to intellectual obstacles like the problem of evil and a predominant intellectual culture of areligious postmodern skepticism.

Thus, one can see how the communicative purposes of a morally perfect God might include *impersonal* evidence of *general* revelation that suggests a superior being may exist. This general revelation may lead one to consider if the superior being may have salvific moral expectations of the human individual, thus providing the intellectual context by which one could properly understand the volitionally challenging evidence of God's personal call. Returning to the analogy, it is within the lifeguard's communicative purposes to put up signs that say something along the lines of "DANGER: Rip currents strong. Do not approach the sandbar." This will make the guard's later, more personalized rebukes easier to understand and more difficult to ignore. Thus, a proponent of Moser's reoriented epistemology and a former doctoral student of his, Brad Seeman, argues that just as it would be within a lifeguard's communicative purposes to post signs that prohibit swimming in certain areas, so also is it within God's communicative purposes to place general signs of his existence in nature.[35] Through creation God reveals his "invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature" and his "glory."[36] Humans, then, ought to expect and therefore be able to recognize some kind of personal communication from a glorious, powerful being that created them.

Clearly natural *revelation* fits the communicative purposes of a God who is worthy of worship, but what about natural *theology*? Besides receiving and reflecting God's *agapē* love and becoming "personifying evidence of God," what role might humans play in God's communicative endeavors? Seeman thinks it would be within the communicative purposes of a morally perfect God to enlist the participation of willing human creatures not only through reflection of his loving character, but also through natural theology. Returning once again to the lifeguard analogy, an ordinary beach-goer might serve the life-guard's communicative purposes not only by obeying the lifeguard's command to avoid rip current areas, but also by pointing to the "No Swimming" signs posted in dangerous areas and

34 Katharyn Waidler, "Volitional Evidence for God," *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2, (2012), 278.

35 Brad Seeman, "No Swimming": God's Communicative Purposes and a Place for Natural Theology in Paul Moser's Religious Epistemology, unpublished, (presented in Baltimore: November 2013), 18-21.

36 Romans 1:20; Psalms 10:9

explaining the danger of rip currents to children who may not understand, thereby making the signs' life-saving commands easier to understand and more difficult to ignore.[37]

In a similar way, by pointing to the evidence for God not only in the human conscience, but also in nature (teleological arguments), and philosophical reasoning (cosmological and ontological arguments), natural theologians can help provide the cognitive context by which one could more easily recognize and less easily ignore God's volitional challenging of the human heart. Of course if the purpose of natural theology is to increase one's intellectual ego by asserting intellectual superiority over someone with an inferior philosophical worldview, it will fail dramatically. As Seeman explains, however, it does not need to be purely a detached intellectual activity, for when natural theology is convincing, "the evidently contrived nature of various atheistic explanations puts real evidential and *volitional* pressure to look to other explanations—explanations clearly moving toward God's revelation."[38] By both critiquing secular interpretations of signs God has placed in nature and making positive arguments that an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God is the best explanation, natural theology makes God's volitional and redemptive calling more difficult to suppress or ignore.

If natural theology is viewed in this lens, it need not be a distraction from the redemptive power of God's spirit. As C. Stephen Evans notes, "theistic arguments derive their force and enjoy whatever plausibility they possess from the signs that lie at their core."[39] Moreover, even the signs themselves are mere pointers to the fundamental reality that explains them. Therefore, when oriented around Moser's foundational evidential question that asks how a morally perfect God would choose to reveal himself to humans and therefore keeping God's redemptive purposes as the ultimate end of every natural theological project, theistic arguments function as humble pointers to the convincing, transformative power of the Gospel and of God's Spirit. Ultimately, one can see that a careful natural theology which always seeks to encourage one to receive and reflect God's redeeming *agapē* love can be deeply God-centered and thus immune to Plantinga's and Moser's objections.

Conclusion

Christian epistemology, like Christian theology, continues to fracture in increasingly oppositional directions. Most Christians still agree, however, that God's ultimate end is to transform willing individuals into agents that

37 Seeman, "No Swimming," 21-22.

38 Seeman, "No Swimming," 24.

39 *Natural Signs…,* 2, (emphasis added).

are freely governed by a motivational center of selfless *agapē* love. If the Church is able to reorient its religious epistemology around the question of what God's communicative purposes would be in accomplishing this end, it can come to a unified epistemology that is God-centered, morally redemptive, and evidentially convincing. Perhaps, armed with a resilient epistemology and thus unified in its theological and philosophical foundations, the Church might be able to reverse the trend of division that has continued ever since protestants split from the Catholic Church five centuries ago.

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Psychology

Terror Management Theory and Conflict:

A Study of Religiosity and Forgiveness

Madeline Ingram,
Sarah McGhee, &
Mereith Shadden

This study explored Terror Management Theory, which assumes that anxiety from the awareness of mortality has an underlying influence on human behavior. The study examines effects of mortality salience (MS) on attitudes of forgiveness toward ingroup and outgroup conflict, and explores religious orientation as a mitigating factor. Samford University undergraduate students received four different manipulations: MS with ingroup offense, MS with outgroup offense, parallel task with ingroup offense, or parallel task with outgroup offense. Forgiveness was measured by total scores on the Emotional and Decisional Forgiveness Scales, as well as the Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression scale. Likert scales assessed participants' judgements of the severity, hurtfulness, and personal meaningfulness of the offense, as well as the severity of punishment they thought the offense deserved. Intrinsic, extrinsic-social, and extrinsic-personal religiosity was measured using the Revised Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale. The effects of religiosity were insignificant, and only a general trend existed between MS and increased forgiveness. However, a significant relationship existed between the mortality salience interaction and conflict, $F(6, 31) = 2.486$, $p = .044$, $eta2 = 0.325$. These results show that MS interacts with conflict over a variety of dependent variables.

Keywords: Terror Management Theory, Interpersonal Conflict, Mortality Salience, Intrinsic Religiosity, and Extrinsic Religiosity, Forgiveness, Conflict Resolution

The news media is quick to remind the American public that seven years after the September 11 attacks on New York City and the initiation of the Global War on Terror, coordinated terrorist attacks still create conflict around the world. With these media reminders of the threat of fatal conflict, the possibility of death is unconsciously close at hand. The psychological impact of the War on Terror sparked a renewed research interest in terror management theory (TMT), a framework for understanding the effects of awareness of death.

Inspired by anthropologist Ernest Becker and developed by social psychologists Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986), TMT explores how awareness of human mortality influences thought and behavior. It holds that realizing the inevitability of human death, also called mortality salience (MS), causes emotions that produce a sense of panic. Furthermore, humans mitigate this sense of panic with differing factors that offer personal security and significance. For example, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon's initial exploration supports self-esteem's role as a mitigating factor, and it argued that individuals use self-esteem to buffer awareness of the inevitability of death. TMT theory also encompasses a broad methodological hypothesis, namely that circumstances provoking MS intensify the individual factors like self-esteem that constitute existential defense mechanisms.

Since then, researchers have explored many other factors besides self-esteem using this methodology. TMT research has well documented that MS influences individuals to defend their cultural worldviews and disparage others, perhaps because they believe the group will "outlive" them. Relatedly, research also documents that an individual's worldview is represented in part through his or her perceived ingroup(s). Of course, this idea implies that MS can escalate conflict between ingroups and outgroups, especially when the conflict involves conflicting worldviews (Jonas & Fritsche, 2013). Indeed, most early work in TMT supported correlations between intergroup conflict and hostile reactions to outgroups (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

Interestingly, however, other research shows that MS can deescalate intergroup conflict and engender positive tendencies. Schimel, Wohl and Williams (2006), for example, found that MS can increase attitudes of forgiveness for ingroup offenders within intergroup conflict. Recognizing this relationship within TMT research, social psychologists loosely group these defense mechanisms into two forms of terror management: destructive forms (e.g. expressing hostility or aggression) and constructive forms (e.g. enhancing close relationships) (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012).

Recent work focusing on the interaction between MS and intergroup conflict shows that

there may be mediating variables that serve as determining factors for whether individuals react to MS in a destructive or constructive form of terror management. One domain of TMT research explores relationship closeness as an influential factor for constructive terror management. For example, Van Tongeren, Green, Davis, Worthington, and Reid (2013) extended the investigation into MS and interpersonal conflict by examining how MS affected forgiveness toward offenders in relationships with high and low commitment levels. With MS primed, they found a direct correlation between relationship closeness and the likelihood of forgiveness. Thus, these results predict that people experiencing conflict within close relationships are likely to forgive, which is an example of a constructive response to MS.

Another domain of TMT research explores religiosity as a factor that people use to diffuse the anxiety associated with MS. Religiosity, broadly defined, is an umbrella term referring to the level of commitment and involvement that people have in religious-based activities and beliefs. Researchers categorize multiple different types of religiosity, and academic debate exists as to which kind of categorization is most accurate. One popular differentiation is between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Donahue, 1985). People who identify as intrinsically religious are "those for whom religion serves as a framework for life by providing both meaning and value." In contrast, people who identify as extrinsically religious approach religion with an instrumental or utilitarian perspective (Jonas & Fritsche, 2006, p. 563). Researchers compartmentalized extrinsic religiosity into extrinsic-personal, in which religion is mainly thought of as a source of comfort, and extrinsic-social, in which religion is mainly considered a source of social benefits (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Tiliopoulos, Bikker, Coxon, & Hawkin, 2007).

Studies show that intrinsically religious people are less likely to react to intergroup conflict with hostile worldview defense than those with an extrinsic or secular approach to religion. Jonas and Fritsche (2006) studied the interaction of MS with religiosity and found that intrinsic religious beliefs mitigated the effects of MS because they used religion as a form of terror management. We predicted that religiosity will also show a mitigating effect on attitudes of forgiveness in intergroup conflict.

Past research methodology required subjects to recall personal offenses and offenders, which although ecologically valid, does not control for variations in meaningfulness or severity of the remembered offense (Van Tongeren et. al, 2013). Our study seeks to ensure a more controlled manipulation of personal conflict by using hypothetical conflict scenarios and inducing MS using the Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey (MAPS; Rosenblatt et al., 1989;

Taylor, 2012). Building on the work of Schimel, Wohl and Williams (2006), who used hypothetical scenarios to study whether MS increases forgiveness of ingroup offenders using intergroup conflict over sports teams, we examined the importance of interpersonal relationships in managing existential concerns by using written scenarios of conflict over academic dishonesty, using a friend versus a stranger as the offender. We hypothesized that MS will increase participant willingness to forgive in conflict scenarios involving an ingroup offender and decrease willingness to forgive in conflicts involving outgroup offenders. To control for the personal relevance of the offense, we also measured the hurtfulness of the offense, the personal meaningfulness of the offense, or the severity of punishment the meaningfulness of the conflict and the severity of the offense on Likert scales. We also evaluated religiosity as a factor that seems to influence intergroup forgiveness. We predicted that high intrinsic religiosity would mediate effects of MS on conflict resolution, and that intrinsically religious participants will be more likely to forgive both ingroup and outgroup offenders than extrinsically religious participants.

Method

Participants

Subjects responded to a request for participation in this study online through *signupgenius.com*, which is a website that offers a free service for organizing and recruiting volunteers. Professors of lower level social science classes at Samford University sent out emails notifying their students that they could sign up for the study and offered a small amount of extra credit in return for their participation. The participants understood the title of the study as "Conflict and Forgiveness Experiment."

The participant sample (N = 39) consisted of 31 females and eight males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years old (M = 19.47, SD = 0.96). One participant was end-pruned because she was only seventeen. There were ten subjects in the MS ingroup condition, nine in the MS outgroup condition, six in the parallel-task ingroup condition, and eight in the parallel-task outgroup condition. In total, 14 subjects were in the parallel group, 19 were in the MS group, 16 were in the ingroup condition, and 17 were in the outgroup condition. All participants except for one reported "yes" that they subscribed to a religion, and 23 reported that they "never miss" a church service.

Materials

The materials used in this study included a warm-up scenario (Pappas, 2006), two interpersonal conflict scenarios, four Likert scale questions, a survey based on the Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey (MAPS; Rosenblatt et al., 1989), a similar survey as parallel writing task, the Emotional and the Decisional Forgiveness Scale (EFS and DFS; Worthington et al., 2012), the Revised Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious

Orientation Scale (ROS; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), and The Relational Engagement of the Sacred for a Transgression (REST; Davis et al., 2010). The appendix contains a copy of the materials that were given to the participants.

The warm-up scenario used was created for group training exercises in solving interpersonal workplace-related conflicts through negotiation at James Madison University. It was used to introduce participants to reading and responding to conflict scenarios. The offender in the scenario was described as "a fellow employee" and a "good friend" (Pappas, 2006).

The researchers used the MAPS scale to prime MS. The original material instructs participants to provide a written response to two open-ended questions dealing with death and mortality, specifically, "What do you think happens to you as you physically die and once you are physically dead?" and "Please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you." Researchers Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, and Breus (as cited in Taylor, 2012) analyze that the value of MAPS stems from its effectiveness in prompting people's mortality-related thoughts. Martens, Burke, Schimel, and Faucher's review (as cited in Taylor, 2012) of the recent literature reflects that some form of MAPS was used in most of the studies in which MS has been measured. After pilot testing this scale with a similar population, we found that the wording of these questions could be confusing, and we altered it to make them more specific. We presented the revised form to our participants, specifically, "*Jot down in three to five sentences as specifically as you can*, what you think will happen to you as you physically die, and once you are physically dead," and "*Please list two to three adjectives that* describe the emotions that the thought of your death arouses in you" (alteration is italicized). A parallel writing task asked the same questions about a "past experience with the dentist office." Participants who received this experimental material were instructed to write about their last class period, if they had not been to the dentist.

The researchers developed two conflict scenarios through multiple iterations of pilot testing with similar populations to the one used in this study. These scenarios imaginatively placed the participant in an academic conflict, with either an ingroup or outgroup member as an offender. The ingroup member was described as a fellow member of a group project assignment, who is known by name and who also lives on the same dormitory hall. The outgroup member was described as someone who goes to the same school, but whose name was unfamiliar, and who was not in the same group assignment. Both conflicts involved were academic plagiarism.

The four 7-item Likert scale questions, based on the work of Van Tongeren (2013),

measured attitudes of forgiveness, specifically the participants' reaction to the conflict scenario. The first question assessed the emotional / psychological hurtfulness of the offense (with 1 = not hurtful at all and 7 = very hurtful). The next Likert scale assessed the personal meaningfulness of the transgression (with 1 = not meaningful at all, to 7 = very meaningful). The third Likert scale measured the perceived severity of the offense (with 1 = not severe at all and 7 = very severe). The fourth Likert scale asked how severe of a professorial reprimand the offense deserves (1 = very light punishment and 7 = very severe.)

The EFS and DFS scales measured emotional and decisional forgiveness, respectively. Both scales consist of eight statements capturing the participants' intensities of emotional or decisional forgiveness (1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree) (Worthington et al., 2012). The EFS includes items such as "I no longer feel upset when I think of him or her" and some reverse-scored items like, "I resent what he or she did to me." The DFS asks reverse-scored items such as "I intend to try to hurt him or her in the same way he or she hurt me" and others like "I will not seek revenge upon him or her." We used the REST scale to determine the effect of religious-based forgiveness (Davis et al., 2010). Participants indicated the degree to which they disagreed or agreed (0 = completely disagree, to 6 = completely agree) about whether each of the four items played a part in the participants' conflict resolution. The items measured the participants' interaction with God about the transgressor; for example, one question states, "Would you ask God to help you see his/her good points?" These scales are summed, with higher scores indicating greater attitudes of forgiveness.

The ROS scale measured the effect of religiosity (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). The ROS scale contains 14 self-report items. Eight items measure intrinsic religiosity with statements such as, "I enjoy reading about my religion." Three items measure extrinsic personal religiosity with statements such as, "What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow." A different three items measure extrinsic social religiosity with statements such as, "I go to church because it helps me to make friends." The ROS scale separates religiosity into three categories of religiosity: intrinsic, extrinsic-social, and extrinsic-personal. Gorsuch and McPherson reported internal consistencies of .83 for intrinsic, .58 for extrinsic-social, and .57 for extrinsic-personal (1989).

Participants also read a short, heartwarming, historical story about conflict resolution (History.com Staff, 2009) and completed a post-test survey. The post-test survey asked for demographic data including age, gender, class, and major. Four Likert scale questions followed, which assessed the participants' understanding

of the instructions for the task, effort in following the directions, overall effort on the task, and overall perception of the task difficulty. These were designed with one meaning "Strongly Disagree" and seven meaning "Strongly Agree."

Design and Procedure

This study was a 2 x 2 x 3 factorial between-groups design. The first independent variable was MS: primed or not. The second independent variable was interpersonal conflict type: ingroup or outgroup. We also tested religiosity as a quasi-independent variable: intrinsic, extrinsic personal, extrinsic social. The dependent variable was attitude of forgiveness.

Prior to the arrival of participants, experimenters set out stapled packets of the materials mentioned above in random order. Upon arrival to the classroom participants sat down at a desk with a packet. The groups were encouraged to read the instructions carefully and fill out the informed consent before beginning.

All groups read the generic conflict scenario, and completed the EFS and DFS. These scores were not evaluated. The MS-ingroup group then filled out MAPS to prime MS, read the conflict scenario with ingroup offender, completed the EFS and DFS, rated their reactions on the four Likert scales, completed the ROS and REST religiosity scales respectively, read a desensitizing story, and completed the post-experiment survey. The MS-outgroup followed the same procedure, using the conflict scenario with the outgroup. The parallel task groups also followed the same procedure, but writing about their experience at the dentist rather than filling out MAPS. Lastly, participants were debriefed regarding the procedures and hypotheses of the experiment, were given an extra credit form for their class, and could leave.

Results

Using SPSS, an ANOVA was performed on the data collected in the 2 x 2 x 3 between-subject factorial experiment to determine the effects of MS, interpersonal conflict, and religiosity on forgiveness. The overall interaction between MS and interpersonal conflict was significant $F(6, 31) = 2.486$, $p = .044$, $eta^2 = 0.325$. There was a significant interaction in the multivariate comparison, considering all the dependent variables together, but not in the individual variable comparison except for one Likert scale item. We investigated religiosity, testing I, Es, and Ep scores as covariates and all were insignificant in this experiment. All post-survey results showed subjects acceptable for inclusion in the study. See *Table 1* for a summary.

MS influenced several notable trends; however, against our prediction, there was not a main effect for MS in this experiment. There was a trend, though insignificant, that the MS-primed participants rated their overall levels of forgiveness higher than non-primed participants ("parallel group") on the EFS, ($F(1, 36) =$

0.849, p = .363, eta^2 = 0.23, and the DFS, F(1, 36) = 0.132, p =.317, eta^2 = .028. The means of their EFS and DFS scores display this trend, with higher scores on these scales indicating greater attitudes of forgiveness. The means of the MS groups for the EFS was 16.636 and 28.455 for the DFS. A comparison of means between the MS ingroup and outgroup shows another trend: the outgroup had higher forgiveness scores (M = 16.909) than the ingroup (M = 16.364) on the EFS. Likewise, the MS outgroup had higher forgiveness scores (M = 29.000) than the ingroup (M = 27.909) on the DFS. In contrast, a comparison of parallel group means showed the outgroup had the lowest forgiveness score with a mean of 14.700 on the EFS. Comparing means across all four groups, the EFS scores were lower than the DFS. The scores on the REST scale were insignificant for both MS and parallel groups. However, the means show the same trends as the other forgiveness scales. MS participants had higher forgiveness scores (M = 18.855) than parallel groups (M = 16.269). The outgroups also had a higher forgiveness score (M = 17.982) than the ingroups (M = 17.241).

We also found an unpredicted significant effect: priming tasks (MS and parallel) had a significant interaction with "severity of offense," a dependent variable measured with one of the Likert Scale assessments of participant response to the conflict, F(1, 36) = 4.122, p = .050, eta^2 = .103. Comparing means shows that MS groups rated the severity of the offense lower (M = 5.591) than parallel group (M = 6.275). This comparison is illustrated in *Figure* 1. However, priming MS did not significantly impact judgement on the hurtfulness of the offense, the personal meaningfulness of the offense, or the severity of punishment (F(1, 36) = 1.160, p =.289, eta^2 = 0.031; F(1, 36) = 0.103, p =.751, eta^2 = .003; F(1, 36) = 0.280, p =.600, eta^2 = .008). *Figures 2* and *3* display a comparison of the means for these Likert assessments with severity of offense.

Also against our prediction, the type of intergroup conflict did not significantly impact participant forgiveness, as measured by the EFS, DFS, or REST scales (F(1, 36) = .001, p = .974, eta^2 = .000; F(1, 36) = .225, p = .638, eta^2 = .006; F(1, 36) = .267, p = .609, eta^2 = .007). Yet, in comparison to the outgroup mean scores on these measures of forgiveness-related variables, the ingroup scores were lower in both EFS and DFS. Again, the REST score followed the same trend and the ingroup had lower forgiveness scores overall.

Notably, conflict group type also had a main effect severity of offense, F(1) = 5.541, p = .024, eta^2 = 0.133. Comparing means shows that MS groups rated the severity of the offense lower (M = 5.591) than parallel group (M = 6.275), see *Figure* 1. However, the type of intergroup conflict did not significantly impact

judgement on the other three Likert assessments: hurtfulness of the offense, the personal meaningfulness of the offense, or the severity of punishment ($F(1) = 1.808$, $p = .187$, $eta^2 = .048$; $F(1) = 1.947$, $p = .171$, $eta^2 = .051$; $F(1) = 1.104$, $p = .300$, $eta^2 = .030$). *Figure 2* and *3* display a comparison of the means for these Likert assessments with severity of offense.

Discussion

The current study explored whether MS increases the likelihood of positive intergroup conflict resolution and whether religiosity mediates that effect. This study incorporated research from Van Tongeren et. al, which supported that MS positively influenced the likelihood of forgiveness based on relationship closeness (2013). Our study also incorporated methodology from past research by Schimel, Wohl, and Williams (2006), who used hypothetical sports-related conflict scenarios to study forgiveness as a form of positive conflict resolution. We altered their method to use academically-related conflict scenarios to test our undergraduate population sample. Lastly, we explored religiosity as a possible mediating factor between MS and forgiveness, based on prior research supporting that intrinsically religious people did not react to conflict with hostility (Donahue, 1985).

The results reported above suggest that MS likely does affect attitudes of forgiveness. Clearly, MS is an important and influential factor because it interacts with conflict over a variety of dependent variables used in this study. We hypothesized that MS would influence participants to be more forgiving to an ingroup offender but not to an outgroup offender. Although the main effect of MS on forgiveness was insignificant, the average scores show that MS increased emotional, decisional, and religious-based forgiveness slightly. Therefore MS influenced participants to be more forgiving overall. These findings support the claim made by Schimel, Wohl, and Williams (2006); MS can increase attitudes of forgiveness for ingroup offenders within intergroup conflict.

Though MS increased each forgiveness type, which seemed to support prior literature, our results also showed that MS influenced the participants to prefer forgiving the outgroup over the ingroup. The average forgiveness score was highest for the mortality salient group responding to conflict involving an outgroup offender, and lowest for the non-mortality salience group responding to conflict involving an outgroup offender. This surprising result could reflect the wide variability across scores in this sample, or it could indicate a new direction for further research investigating ingroup forgiveness preferences.

We also found that across all four groups, the emotional forgiveness scores were lower than the decisional forgiveness scores. This result suggests that the participants were over-

all less emotionally forgiving than decisionally forgiving. We speculate that a gender difference may be reflected by this result, given our mostly female population sample, who may have felt that intellectual forgiveness was easier than emotional forgiveness. The influence of gender on forgiveness is also an area for further research. Alternatively, Samford University students may simply show a high level of forgiveness overall, forming a ceiling effect in the data. In this study, intergroup conflict type had an insignificant effect on forgiveness. Despite this insignificant result, the average forgiveness scores between the ingroup and outgroup reflected a trend toward forgiveness of the outgroup offender. Ingroup forgiveness scores were lower than the outgroup scores on all three measures of forgiveness-related variables. This result suggests that the participants tended to be more affected by ingroup offenders than outgroup offenders, and less likely to forgive them than the outgroup offenders.

We examined our measures to explore a possible reasoning for this effect. Neither MS nor intergroup conflict type made a significant impact on participants' judgement of the hurtfulness of the offense, the personal meaningfulness of the offense, or the appropriate severity of punishment. However, there was a significant main effect for the judged severity of the offense. The offense was judged as significantly more severe when the participant was primed with MS and when the offender was a member of an ingroup. This finding implies that participants thought the transgression was worse when committed by a member of their ingroup. This implication may help explain why the results suggest that participants tended to be less forgiving of the ingroup offender. In our scenario, we described the ingroup member as a person who lived in the same dormitory hall as the participant, who worked on the same academic group project as the participant, and who the participant knew by name. These factors may have influenced participants to imagine the ingroup offender as a friend. Although the research of Van Tongeren et. al (2013) suggests that people are more likely to forgive offenses committed by someone in a close relationship, transgressions committed by friends may have a more nuanced interaction with MS. An alternative prediction based on our results is that more severe transgressions are less likely to be forgiven, independent of MS and ingroup and outgroup conflict types. These possibilities may be the reason why this dependent variable behaved differently than the others.

We also hypothesized that high intrinsic religiosity would mediate the effects of MS on forgiveness and that intrinsically religious participants would be more likely to forgive than extrinsically religious participants. This concept was based on research by Donahue (1985) and Gorsuch (1989). However, our measures of in-

trinsic, extrinsic-social, and extrinsic-personal religiosity yielded insignificant interactions with both MS and conflict type. These results show that the religiosity variables did not display a mediating effect on attitudes of forgiveness. One reason for this result may reflect our measurement material. Our scale was a self-report measure, which meant that we relied on the honesty of our participants, their introspective ability, and their interpretation of our Likert scales, among other limitations. These factors may have prevented us from capturing behavior. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity is inherently related to behavior, according to Donahue's research (1985). Therefore, further research may solve some of the problems above by using a behavioral measure of religiosity instead of self-report measures. Several overall characteristics limit these conclusions. The convenience samples of predominately female undergraduate university students question the external validity of the experiment. Also, the participants were not completely randomized because the packet that they received, and the subsequent group that they were in, depended on the time that they arrived in the classroom and which desk they sat in. Another major limitation was that the groups were not completely equal.

Despite these limitations, the studies presented above strongly suggest that MS influences attitudes of forgiveness within interpersonal conflict situations. Our trends show that MS inspires people's decisions to forgive more, especially when the offender in question is of an outgroup. These results can be used to inform our understanding of relationship dynamics, and the role of unconscious awareness in decision-making.

People's perceptions of themselves and others influence their responses to existential fear and interpersonal conflict. This study contributes to research on the particular motivations that drive these perceptions. The specific role that awareness of death plays in an individual's defenses is uncertain, but continually expanding literature on this topic, including our study, provides empirical results for exploration. These results support Terror Management Theory's underlying assumptions that awareness of human mortality influences thought and behavior, and that this influence can have wide-reaching effects. Though a renewed research interest in TMT may have been sparked by worldwide military conflict with terrorism, the threat of death may be one of the only universal, basic motivations underlying the human experience, and further research on this concept is encouraged to generate a more comprehensive framework for explaining its influence.

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Figure 1

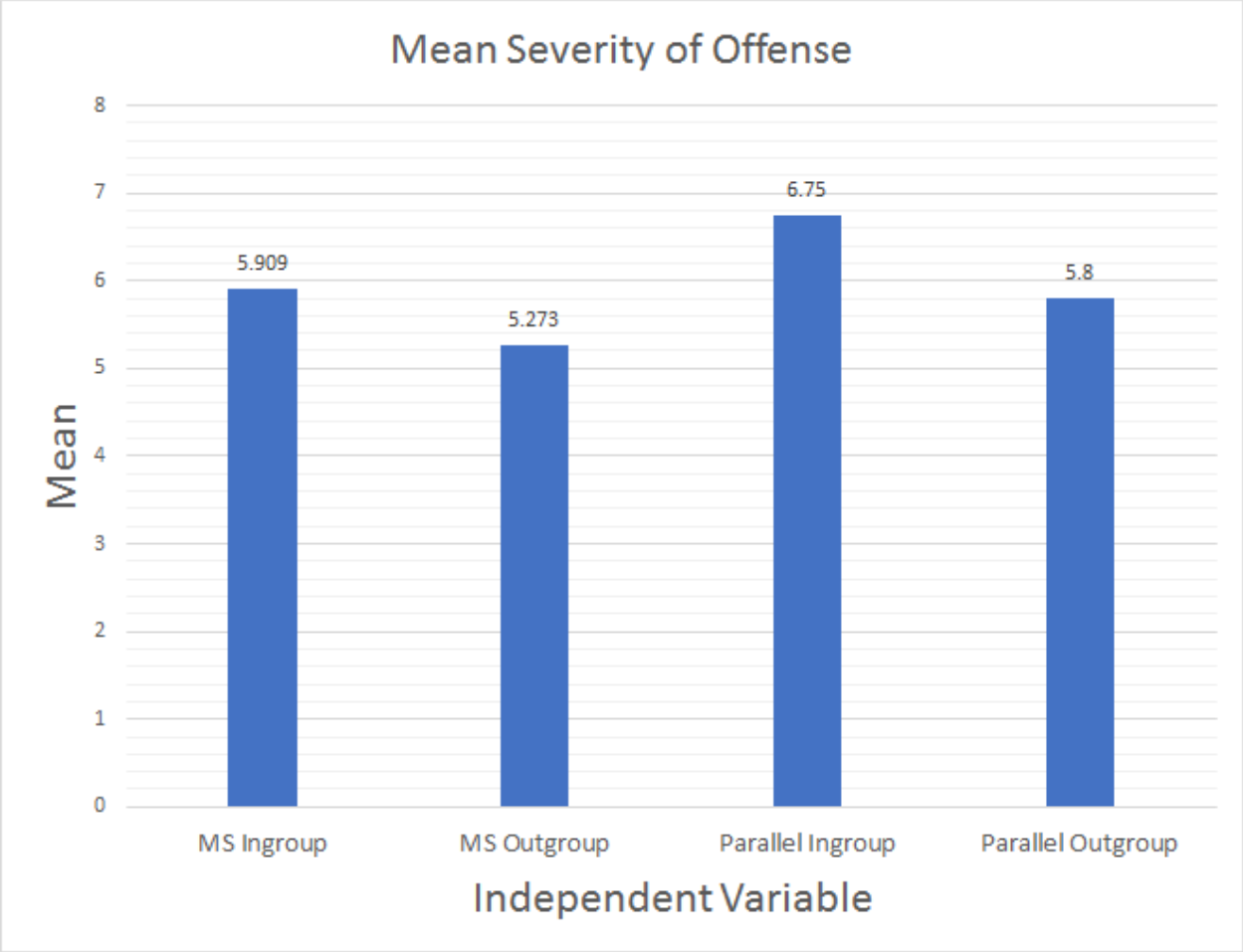
Mean Severity of Offense
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0
Mean
5.909
5.273
6.75
5.8
MS Ingroup
MS Outgroup
Parallel Ingroup
Parallel Outgroup
Independent Variable

Figure 2

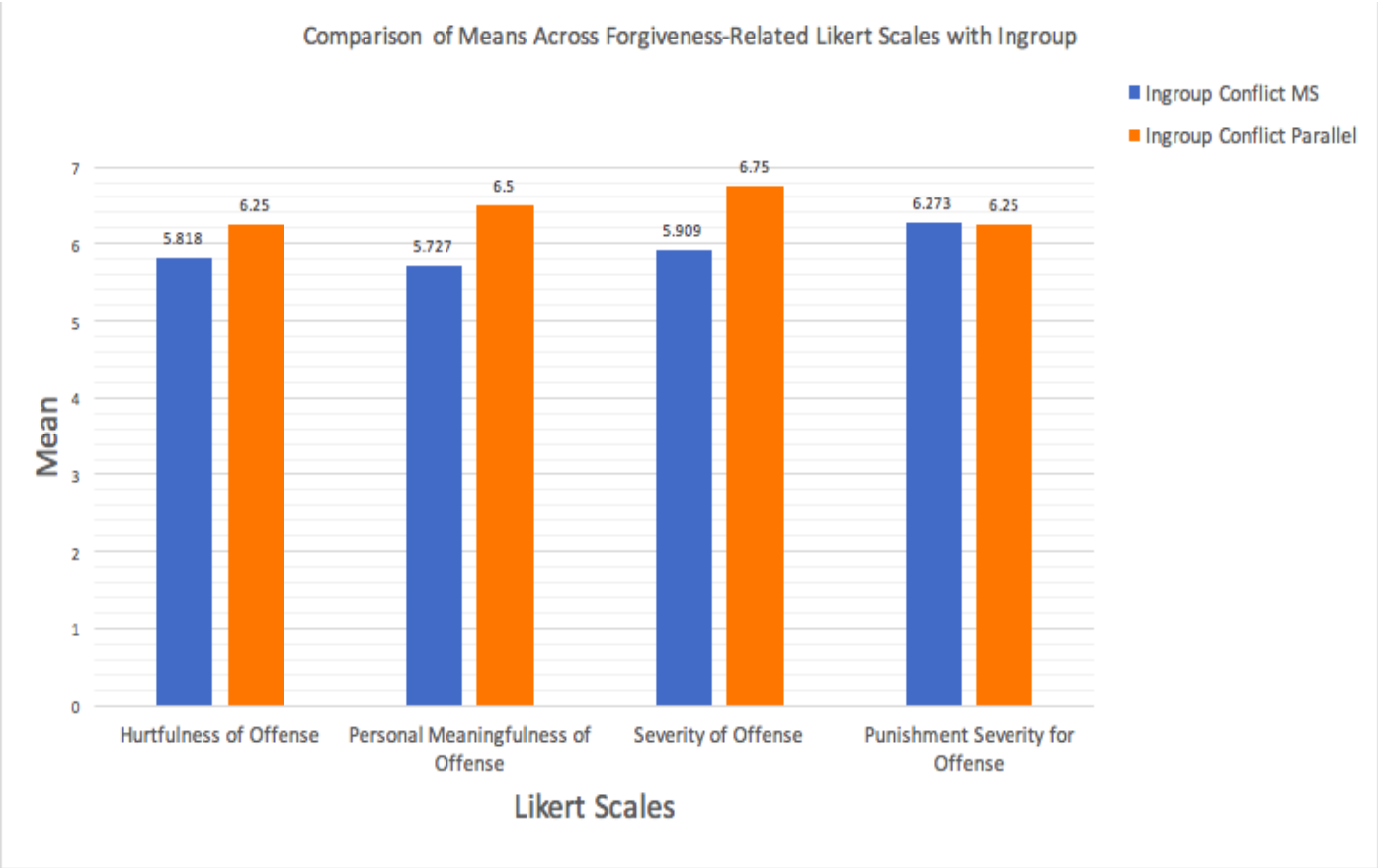

Figure 3

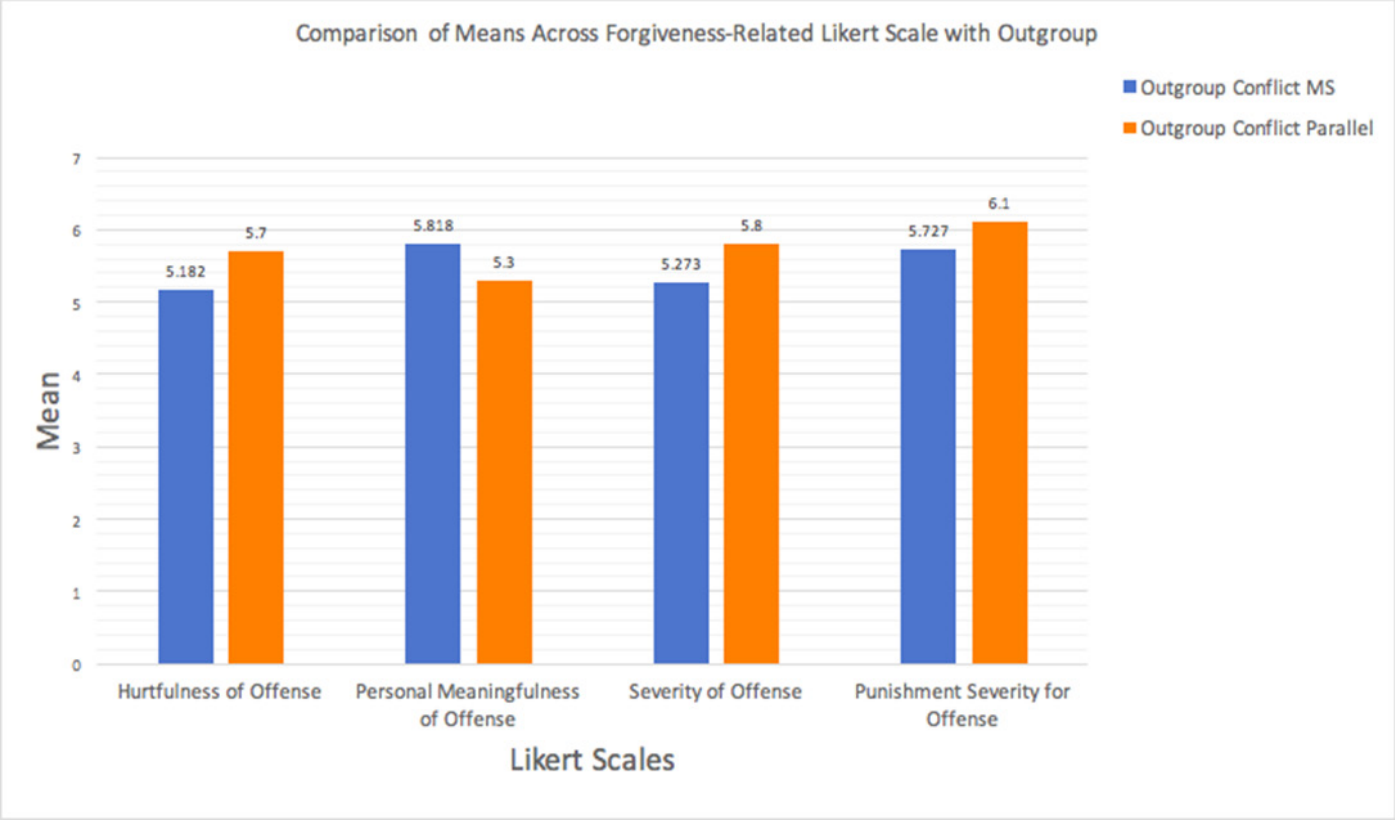

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Post-Survey Responses (1-7 Scale):

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TaskUnderstanding17	40	1.0	7.0	6.400	1.3166
Followeddirections17	40	6.0	7.0	6.925	.2667
Effort17	40	5.0	7.0	6.825	.4465
Taskdifficulty17	40	1.0	7.0	1.850	1.4242
Valid N (listwise)	40				

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History

Justice in the Hills:
How the Dedham/Natick Land Controversy Reconciled Indian and Colonial Understandings of Property Ownership

Keely Smith

Natick, now a sleepy suburb of the bustling Boston, was once a hotbed for religious fervor and interracial relations. The missionary John Eliot established this Massachusetts Bay Colony town in 1652 with hopes of forming a community of practicing Christian Indians, and it quickly became the Praying Town closest to Eliot's expectations based on New England function and culture. As the town assumed certain aspects of English culture and Christian identity, it had to adjust to the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court and politics with neighboring communities. One such example of this adjustment period for both the Christian Indians and the nearby English townspeople of Dedham was the Dedham/Natick land controversy that raged from 1650 to 1660. The long-lasting dispute tested the validity of English and Indian conceptions of property ownership in the colony and set a precedent for the Christian Indians' role in society. This dispute typically receives little coverage in Praying Town histories, yet its significance lies in the multiple ecological and legal standards reconciled as a result of the feud. The Dedham/Natick controversy was a catalyst of the development of colonial Massachusetts property rights, as demonstrated through an analysis of the English and Indian cultural understandings of justice.

Natick, Algonquian for "a place of the hills," is a southern Massachusetts town situated among the knolls of Peegan Hill and Carver Hill along the Charles River. The waterway courses through the glens of the town and feeds the ponds that speckle the region, supporting a range of flora and fauna. However, the variety and fertility of the settlement's topography claim minimal attention in the recorded town history.[1] Most remember Natick more for its religious and cross-cultural significance during the colonial period than for the sleepy rolling landforms of its namesake. The missionary John Eliot used this isolated spot in 1650 as a landing stage from which he could establish a community of practicing Christian Indians.[2] Eliot's religious inspiration shaped the town of Natick's development primarily through his creation of a civil government that reflected the organization outlined in Exodus 18:21, which calls for rulers of hundreds, fifties, and tens.[3] Eliot also expected the inhabitants of Natick to assume the cultural and economic customs of other Puritan townships in colonial New England. Massachusetts Bay colonists did not believe that adoption of Christian canon alone was sufficient for the Indians to receive salvation. As a result, the Indians of Natick planted orchards, branded their own cattle, and established additional positions of municipal authority such as constables, town clerks, and selectmen to mirror their English neighbors. As the Indians increasingly exhibited the Puritan lifestyle and social organization, the Massachusetts General Court had to establish a precedent for how it would treat the Christian Indians under the law. Increasingly frequent interactions between the English colonists and the Indians of Natick forced them to reconcile previously held understandings of justice.

This reconciliation of cultures was a complex endeavor that warranted decades of adjustment for both the English and the Indians. One of the most biting long-term quarrels was between the Natick Indians and the settlers of Dedham, a neighboring English town about ten miles southeast of Natick.[4] From 1650 to 1660, the colonists of Dedham insistently demanded the General Court grant them the right to a portion of the land the Natick Indians had already claimed and improved. Dedham justified their claim through authority of the Massachu-

1 Daniel Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England. Of their several nations, numbers, customs, manners, religion and government, before the English planted there* (Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 2004-2012), 40; William Biglow, *History of the Town of Natick, Mass. From the Days of the Apostolic Eliot, MDCL, to the Present Time, MDCCCXXX* (Boston: Marsh, Capen, & Lyon, 1895), 4-5.

2 Biglow, *History of the Town of Natick, Mass.*, 4.

3 Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England,* 41.

4 Ibid., 40.

setts Bay Colony General Court as of 1636 and through the native Indian right of Massachuset sachem Chickataubut. John Eliot assumed the role as intermediary between the Indians and the General Court. He argued for Natick's ownership of the contested land based on the influence of another powerful Indian, Cutshamekin, as well as on an inverted form of the English conception of *vacuum domicilium*, which was a justification for exploiting unused land. The General Court deliberated for a decade about the merits of each argument and decided Eliot's argument of native Indian right combined with *vacuum domicilium* would prevail. The dispute was essential to the protection of Indian land use and the incorporation of Natick's Christian Indians into the Massachusetts Bay Colony legal scene.

The Natick Indians have enthralled historians for centuries as a result of John Eliot's success in creating a theocratic style community of Indians eager to accept the Gospel.[5] Historians have largely focused on the descriptions of Eliot and Superintendent of the Praying Indians, Daniel Gookin, to illuminate the lifestyles, motives, and historical context of Natick's Christian Indians. *The Eliot Tracts*, a compilation of writings from John Eliot, Thomas Shepard, and a variety of other Puritan leaders, offers the most detailed firsthand accounts of missionary work in the region and has thus acted as the driving set of texts for secondary research. Natick is a subject often mentioned but rarely exclusively studied; historians who write about multiethnic interactions in colonial New England, and particularly those interested in Praying Towns, reference Natick, albeit in passing. It is usually connected to other Praying Towns as a monolithic block that lumps together many different Indian communities and their various motivations. Recent scholarly trends have witnessed a more focused view of Eliot's Praying Towns and even of Natick itself, yet the Dedham/Natick land controversy is often overlooked. The controversy deserves careful review not only because it was a major source of contention in the foundational years of Natick, but also because the case offers insight into the development of land justice through a synthesis of English and Indian conceptions of ownership. This study investigates the Dedham/Natick land grant controversy, arguing that the case was a catalyst for the development of colonial Massachusetts property rights for a multiethnic population through its acknowledgment of English as well as Indian cultural understandings of justice.

John Eliot stumbled upon the area the Indians referred to as Natick while trying to locate a site that would offer the Praying Indians sufficient space to settle yet would still remain in close proximity to the Bay colonists

5 James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 142.

for protection. Its fertile landscape and convenient access to the Charles River rendered it a promising setting for a new town. The families of Indian head clansmen John Speen and Antony dwelled in this region, but they likely had not resided there for a long period of time based on the lack of Indian artifacts pre-dating English contact in the region. The two clansmen approved of Eliot's missionary ambitions and helped him obtain 2,000 acres of the land. Soon afterward Eliot began plans for constructing a meetinghouse and distributing property among the incoming Indian families.[6] According to Gookin, the Indians created "three long streets; two on the north side of the river; and one, on the south; with house lots to every family. There is a handsome large fort, of a round figure, palisaded with trees; and a foot bridge over the river, in form of an arch, the foundation of which is secured with stone." Although the Natick Indians continued living in wigwams, their traditional and more temporary form of housing, Gookin's description nonetheless demonstrated their long-term investment in the site.[7]

Eliot's control of the land, however, was tenuous by both English and Indian legal standards. The English crown previously declared ownership of this area as part of the strip of land reaching from the Atlantic Ocean to the South Sea set aside for the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629. The town of Dedham then claimed the rights to a portion of this land tract in a 1636 Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court sanction, which stated, "the bounds of the towne shall run from the markt tree by Charles Ryver on the north west side of Roxberry bounds, one mile & halfe north east, & from thence three miles north west, & so from thence five miles southewest, & on the south west side Charles Ryver from the south east side of Roxberry bounds, to run four mile on a south west line."[8] At least from the English perspective, such a declaration was sufficient to secure the region for uninhibited colonial settlement.[9]

Although the English government claimed an expansive tract of land in its charter of Massachusetts, Indian inhabitants called for additional considerations for the native land

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6 James W. Morley, *From Many Backgrounds: The Heritage of the Eliot Church of South Natick* (Natick, MA: The Natick Historical Society, 2007), 19.

7 Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England,* 41.

8 Mass. Col. Rec. 1, 173 in *The Early Records of the Town of Dedham, Massachusetts 1659-1673*, vol. 4, ed. Don Gleason Hill (Dedham, MA: Town of Dedham, 1894), 235.

9 Yasuhide Kawashima, *Indians and the Law in Colonial Massachusetts 1689-1763* (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1967), 89.

of the new colony.[10] In addition to the royal colonial charter's declared land ownership, the white colonists justified their claims through the degree of usage (or lack thereof) of the land in question. The settlers adopted the principle of *vacuum domicillium*; they assumed responsibility for land they believed Indians "left wasted and unimproved."[11] In many cases the Indians would only occasionally utilize the terrain and would leave the land devoid of fencing and livestock. These irregular agricultural practices fed into a sense of English entitlement. According to environmental historian William Cronon, the Europeans did not accept the mobile hunting and gathering lifestyle as a sufficient form of land management, and the "Indians appeared to squander the resources that were available to them."[12] Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, for his part, believed natural right to land was useful "when men held the earth in common every man sowing and feeding where he pleased," but civil right supplanted the power of natural right when crops, livestock, and enclosure created an individualized conception of livelihood and sustenance.[13] Winthrop therefore asserted that if the land had not undergone settlement, "the country lay open to any that could and would improve it." In the Dedham/Natick controversy, the European Dedhamites who claimed the area had yet to use the land in question. The Natick Indians, in contrast, had planted orchards and enclosed the space "before dedham had any knowlidg of it as a toune."[14] Therefore, this English notion of *vacuum domicilium* had to be managed in a distinctive, yet nonetheless applicable, manner.

Even if the Indians of Natick had the Eurocentric theory of *vacuum domicilium* on their side, additional provisions for Indian property rights also gave them justification for their claim of the contested land. Colonial historian Yasuhide Kawashima in his work on Indians and the law in colonial Massachusetts stated, "No matter how the colonists interpreted these

10 Kawashima, "Indians and the Law," 88.

11 Ibid., 89.

12 William Cronon, *Changes in the land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 56.

13 John Winthrop, "Reasons to Be Considered, and Objections with Answers," *Winthrop Papers*, vol. 2, *1623-1630*, ed. S. Mitchell (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1931), 140-1.

14 First quote John Winthrop, *The Journal of John Winthrop, 1630-1649*, ed. Richard S. Dunn, James Savage, and Laetitia Yeandle (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 284; second quote Massachusetts Archives XXX, 24, 25, in *The Early Records of the Town of Dedham, Massachusetts 1659-1673*, vol. 4, ed. Don Gleason Hill (Dedham, MA: Town of Dedham, 1894), 254; Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 56.

native rights to the land, they had to recognize the natives' 'very extensive rights' in the land and had to secure most of the land either by purchase or donation from the Indians who actually possessed it." John Endecott, the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony before Winthrop, had direct orders that demonstrated Kawashima's assertion: "If any of the Savages pretend Right of Inheritance to all or any Part of the Lands graunted in our Pattent, we pray you endeavor to purchase their tytle, that we may avoyde the least Scruple of Intrusion." No matter how much the New England colonists theorized about their rights to Indian land, they still were inclined to secure their own holdings on a legal European standard. For this reason, the colonists purchased nearly all the Indian land they desired. These purchases offered the colonists security in future property sales without the opportunity for objection to the legitimacy of their own land ownership. However, the transactions with the Indians were a secondary precaution used by the colonists to ensure the legal division of the Indians and their natural land right. The grants of the Massachusetts Bay Colony General Court remained the primary sanction necessary to obtain property ownership in the colony.[15] Regardless of the power of *vacuum domilicium* to justify the Indians' claim, the inhabitants of Natick could also argue that no explicit, documented sale of the property had taken place.

The Dedham/Natick land controversy revealed this delicate interplay between Indian land ownership and the power of the colonial General Court. When Dedham attempted to legitimize its claim for the land, it recalled the sanctions both by the General Court and by the Indian lineage of the powerful Massachusett sachem Chickataubut. Because John Eliot could not refute the 1636 General Court grant to Dedham, he chose to highlight the Indians' natural right to the land in his argument. Eliot refused the assertion that the deceased Chickataubut had the power to offer the land to Dedham and instead held that the land belonged to Chickataubut's son Josias Wampatuk, "who had received it from his maternal grandmother." Wampatuk was likely too young to assert his role as sachem, which means his guardian Cutshamekin would have assumed responsibility for such matters. Eliot argued that Cutshamekin was the one to allow for the creation of Natick in 1650.[16] Claims of natural Indian right were often weaker than those referencing General Court decisions. However, the complexity and novelty of this situation rendered Indian ownership significant enough to cloud the prior decision of the General Court land distribution grant.

Conflicting claims on Indian rights from

15 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 57; Kawashima, *Indians and the Law*, 90-93.

16 Morley, *From Many Backgrounds*, 20.

John Eliot and the town of Dedham prolonged the case. Both asserted their right to the land through Indian lineage, but the hereditary argument involved a plethora of inconsistencies that further impaired the clarity of each party's arguments. No definitive set of written documents existed that could clearly prove right versus wrong because neither Indians nor colonists kept consistent records of original native land rights. Furthermore, confusion of ownership was not unusual for Indians of the region. They generally viewed the ownership and usability of land on flexible terms according to the change of seasons, diplomatic relations, or tribe migration. The influx of European-born diseases that eroded tribal political authority and made land possession even more irresolute magnified this flexibility in land usage and ownership. The harrowing effects of widespread disease forced many tribal groups to disband and combine with other groups, either peacefully or violently.[17] The disintegration and formation of Indian tribes created an unstable position for many sachems as the heads of their respective family clans. Territorial rights were typically under the control of the sachem, "the leader in whom the village's political identity at least symbolically inhered." The sachem's power was as fluid as that of the Indian groups themselves.[18] A sachem of another more powerful clan vying for the same space could usurp a lesser sachem whose tribe suffered from disease and blur the lines of tribute, territory, and sovereignty. Although John Eliot and the town of Dedham might have hoped that lineage could have provided clear-cut evidence for their claims, a multitude of unanticipated nuances involving the irregularity of tribal leadership and land usage shaped the case.

The power struggle among the differing Indian clans and an unclear Indian political hierarchy were major sources of conflict in the Dedham/Natick case. John Eliot traced the rights to 2,000 acres of land for the town to John Speen and Antony, heads of powerful clans, who had recently moved from the town Nonantum with the Indian leader named Waban.[19] Although Waban's status in the Indian community remains somewhat unclear, Daniel Gookin held him in the highest acclaim, stating, "I do not know any Indian that excels him."[20] Waban might have been a Nipmuc sachem, but historians do recognize his success through trading and rising to power through marriage to

17 Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 62.

18 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 59.

19 Morley, *From Many Backgrounds*, 19.

20 Gookin, *Historical Collections of the Indians in New England*, 44.

a Nashobah sachem's daughter. In 1635, Waban and his kinsmen relocated to a new town called Nonantum, where Eliot came to preach for the first time in 1646. The group of Indians that settled in Nonantum thus became the Nonantums, many of whom identified as Natick Indians after Eliot established the Praying Town.

Historians have theorized that John Speen and Antony were Nimpuc Indians under the authority of the Massachusett sachem Cutshemakin, who was the guardian of Josias Wampatuck, the son of Chikataubut.[21] This assumption would have explained why the legal right of Chikataubut versus Cutshemakin was so significant and specifically how Eliot's argument could have been correct. However, for Eliot's explanation to be sound, John Speen and Antony would have had to have remained under Cutshamekin's land jurisdiction, land power in Wampatuck's clan would have had to have been passed maternally, and Cutshamekin would have had to have agreed to Eliot's missionary settlement.

Because the Nipmucs were a lesser tribe even after the formidable Massachuset population plummeted, the land John Speen and Antony claimed might still have been under the collective authority of the Massachuset sachems Chikataubut or Cutshamekin.[22] The Nipmucs were a weak, disconnected tribe of about 500 people in central Massachusetts. Their territory was often under the jurisdiction of other, more powerful tribes such as the Massachuset. The Massachuset tribe was once one of the most powerful tribes in the region until disease reduced the population by approximately 83%. The population deteriorated to a devastating 500.[23] If Chikataubut were truly the former mighty sachem that sources describe, however, he would most likely have had prevailing power over land transactions in the region as the Dedhamites claimed.[24] According to historian William Cronon, "Insofar as a village 'owned' the land it inhabited, its property was expressed in the sovereignty of the sachem."[25] Although John Speen and Antony might have owned the land to the degree that they lived and worked on it, a Massachusett sachem might nonetheless have claimed rights of sovereignty over the region.

No extant documents recording a grant of land from Cutshamekin to John Eliot for a Praying Town were available for reference, but

21 Morley, *From Many Backgrounds*, 12, 19-20.

22 Ibid.

23 Kawashima, "Indians and the Law," 18-19.

24 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 59; Kawashima, "Indians and the Law," 3.

25 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 60.

John Eliot's claim remained reasonable based on the context of his prior relations with the sachem. Cutshamekin had considerable experience dealing with the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and colonists viewed him as one of the most reliable of nearby Indian sachems due to his precedent of compliance with English demands and diplomacy. Recognizing the colonial government could provide protection from other dangerous Indian tribes, Cutshamekin readily consented to submission to the Bay Colony in 1644 and was an ideal candidate for Eliot to proselytize.[26] Eliot met with Cutshamekin and his council at Neponset in the fall of 1646 and attempted to explain Christianity in a way that the Indians would understand and accept. To Eliot's dismay, Cutshamekin and his people were unshaken. Rather than following Eliot's canonical exposition of the Scripture, the Indians instead asked for explanations for the causes of thunder, ocean waves, and the wind that the missionary could not sufficiently explain.[27] This less than enthusiastic reception was not the end of interactions between the missionary and the sachem. By 1647, Christianity had gained popularity in Neponset, and even Cutshamekin admitted to having accepted the Christian God. Historian Neal Salisbury contended Cutshamekin changed his mind because he recognized that Christianity was the key to maintaining authority in his evolving community.[28] In *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues*, even Eliot questioned the profundity of Cutshamekin's holy devotion. However, the sachem's conversion, even if only diplomatic, supported the missionary's land argument. Eliot also mentioned that many Nonantum and Neponset Indians were unhappy with Cutshamekin for selling an expansive amount of coastal land to the English in 1636, which was the reason why many in the tribe moved inland.[29] According to this evidence, one might hypothesize that Cutshamekin would have been eager to sell rights to the Natick land if it were diplomatically advantageous. What remains uncertain is if Cutshamekin would have deemed granting the rights to such land beneficial. While historians cannot verify Eliot's Natick claim, it was convincing enough for the

26 Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 30, 40.

27 Thomas Shepard, "The Day-Breaking, if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New England," in *The Eliot Tracts, With Letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 84; Morley, *From Many Backgrounds*, 12.

28 Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1974): 36.

29 John Eliot, *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interactions*, ed. Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 125.

General Court to eventually side with the Natick Indians.

The situation is as unclear for modern historians as it was in the 17th century. Neither side likely had a full understanding of the Indians' conceptions of land ownership and sovereignty. This lack of comprehension was common in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, to the point that a variety of Indian clans could sell the same piece of property to the English.[30] Similar to the English concept of *vacuum domicilium*, Indians also based their understanding of ownership on land usage, reflected in the notion of usufruct principles. The observance of these principles meant that Indians, unlike their European neighbors, typically comprehended land ownership as how a person or group used and treated the land. While they might "sell" a tract of land, it was often for rights such as farming or fishing. However, the sellers might no less expect to live and work on that land at the same time.[31] While usufruct principles created a flexible concept of property ownership that communal land usage supported, *vacuum domicilium* espoused a more strictly defined understanding of ownership that individual land usage justified. Perhaps the Natick Indians, working under this concept of usufruct rights, underestimated the influence of the English legal system and its stringent notions of property lines and exclusive possession. Each interaction of the colonists and the Indians, then, in regard to the possession of New England terrain, was a culmination of this convoluted amalgamation of legal expectations. As the two groups intermingled with greater frequency, the conflicting legal traditions became increasingly difficult to unravel.

Dedham's reaction represented the inconsistency of English colonial land ownership. Dedham disregarded the English concept of *vacuum domicilium* because in this case the Indians were the ones working terrain that Dedham had left untouched. Instead, Dedham claimed that the Indians were guilty of "Illegall possessing, and improveing, and Detainineing a parcel of Land" to which they were not granted rights.[32] The colonial town demonstrated the strict, individualized aspect of English property ownership when it argued the Indians should not have been allowed to work there because it was not their land to tend. Eliot countered that argument by means of the traditional *vacuum domicilium* and repeatedly emphasized that the Indians had been improving the land even before Dedham realized it, which legitimized their

30 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 70.

31 Ibid., 67.

32 Mass. Arch. XXX, 89, in *The Early Records*, 250.

enduring existence in Natick.[33]

The fact that the Indians planted orchards and cornfields and enclosed the debated land demonstrated the mélange of cultural influences coloring the developing Praying Town. The Indians' choice to plant crops and fence the land reflected English agricultural practices. Although Indians from southern Massachusetts were already more inclined to participate in agriculture than their hunting and gathering northern neighbors, the Natick Indians' fencing habits undoubtedly originated from England.[34] Southern Massachusetts Indians might have practiced agriculture, but typically they remained mobile on a seasonal basis that revolved around the growth of their crops and the fertility of the soil.[35] The Dedham/Natick land controversy exhibited how the Natick Indians forwent this sense of mobility when they enclosed the disputed land; their maintenance of the same fields for over a decade with no signs of intended migration demonstrated this pattern.[36] In a 1649 letter from Eliot in *The Glorious Progress of the Gospel*, the Apostle to the Indians described how he encouraged these European tendencies by "promis[ing] them many hundred trees, which [he] reserve[d] in nurseries for them" and by attempting to secure tools for the fencing of the fields and orchards.[37] This kind of support not only reinforced the preservation and stabilization of the developing town of Natick, but it also portrayed how the permanency and individuality of English colonial land ownership transitioned to an Indian context.

Another point Eliot highlighted to persuade the General Court was the Natick Indians' status as Praying Indians. The English colonists and the General Court had a vested interest in the progress of Indian missions and the spreading of the Gospel message, and for this reason Eliot attempted to guilt those opposed to Natick's land practices into recognizing the holy significance of the Indian town's development. Before King Philip's War in 1675, there was a strong sense of English paternalism and responsibility in regard to the salvation of the Indians. The New England Company for the Propagation of the Gospel formed in 1649 to supply missionary projects with funds from congregations in England, and therefore the Bay Colony felt

33 Mass. Arch. XXX, 24, 25, in *The Early Records*, 254.

34 Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, 37-38.

35 Ibid., 42-45.

36 Mass. Arch. XXX, 24, 25, in *The Early Records*, 252, 254.

37 John Eliot, "The Glorious Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians of New England," in *The Eliot Tracts, With Letters from John Eliot to Thomas Thorowgood and Richard Baxter*, ed. Michael P. Clark (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 157.

pressured to show improvement in the missionary arena.[38] Eliot recognized this pressure and attempted to prove the importance of the Natick Indians' use of the land when he stated, "these actings of the English, doe make the prophane Indians laugh at the praying Indians, & at praying to God . . . to Natike they dare not come because of Dedhams actings. Now if Natik also be overthrowen, let wise men looke upon the consequences, in respect of God & man."[39] Eliot argued the use of the Natick land should be considered on a level beyond the legality of Indian right or English claim. Because the General Court was partially responsible for the success of Indian proselytization in Massachusetts, Eliot's reminder of the severity of the situation from a missionary standpoint proved convincing in this discussion.

When the General Court finally persuaded Dedham to relinquish its claim on the Natick land, Dedham still refused to accept the primacy of Indian right. Instead, they chose to view their loss as a righteous gift: "That the Indians do acknowledge what is now granted unto them (at least any more y^n w^t they were in actuall imediate possession & improvement of before Dedham was Planted) to bee from the Love & Christian condesendency of y^e English of Dedham and not from y^e right of Any Indian Title out bidding theirs."[40] Although the townspeople of Dedham did not accept the Indian land rights and endeavored to claim that Eliot had fabricated the Indian titles and split the land up himself for the progression of his missionary aspirations, they finally had to recognize the supreme influence of *vacuum domicilium* in English legal culture.[41] To save face, their alleged property gift to the Natick Indians allowed them to appear as though they, too, hoped to support the progression of the Gospel and brotherly love among Christian neighbors.

This General Court decision did not end the conflict between Dedham and Natick, but it did demonstrate the variety of considerations the General Court had to contemplate to agree on a fair decision. It finally chose to allot the Natick Indians 6,000 acres of the disputed land and compensate Dedham with 8,000 acres for the settlement of a new town, Deerfield, but the decision was not without considerable deliberation.[42] The controversy entangled traditional English conquest and land usage expectations

38 Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, 95; Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians*, 207.

39 Mass. Arch. XXX, 99, 100, in *The Early Records*, 260.

40 Mass. Arch. XXX, 89, in *The Early Records*, 249.

41 Mass. Arch. XXX, 96, 97, in *The Early Records*, 267.

42 Jean M. O'Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39.

with Indian usufruct principles while paying lip service to the religious setting of colonial New England. It represented the fortitude of English legal procedure yet still honored the complexities of Indian political authority. Natick, the "place of the hills," should be regarded as much more than a site for Eliot to spread the Gospel to the Indians. It should be considered as a catalyst for the development of colonial legal justice that responded to the cross-cultural demands of New England's inhabitants. This case, though rarely mentioned in Praying Town scholarship, set a precedent for future colonial interactions with Indians and further defined Natick's position in the greater Massachusetts Bay Colony.

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