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Philosophy of 'As If': Contemporary Applications and Defense

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Philosophy of the 'As If': Contemporary Applications and Defense

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Abstract

This thesis applies Hans Vaihinger's *Philosophy of 'As If'*, published originally in 1924, onto contemporary philosophical debate. Section 1 develops Vaihinger's axiom of the evolutionary mind and his conception of logic and fiction. Section 2 further examines Vaihinger's system of fictions and its metaphysical and epistemological implications. Sections 3-5 apply Vaihinger's *Philosophy of 'As If'* towards the contemporary debate surrounding ethics. In sections 3-5 I point towards the presence, and use, of fictions within contemporary accounts of God, causation, free will, the self, and morality. Finally, in section 6 I raise potential objections to Vaihinger's view and attempt to defend it.

1. Introduction to *The Philosophy of 'As If'*

Hans Vaihinger's book *The Philosophy of 'As If'* begins by positing a fundamental axiom, that the mind functions for our benefit, or survival, rather than in the pursuit of objective truth. From this idea comes not only his system of fictions, but an entire theoretical explanation of the world and an origin for idealistic belief, idealistic behavior and advanced science; which would be impossible without the understanding and ordering of chaotic sensory data that fictions provide. Vaihinger further claims that despite their indispensability and justification, these fictions are not direct representations of the world but are always mediated by the other fictions and their evolutionary function. Most controversially, he holds that because even our senses

arrive to us having been pre-interpreted in an unreal but comprehensible way, we can never hold real knowledge in general.

1.1 The Mind and Thought

In order to explain and defend Vaihinger's epistemology and metaphysics, I must first describe the characteristics of his evolutionarily driven conception of the mind. He begins by explaining that a mind is the organically unified whole of determined mental actions and reactions rather than a substance in itself. Moreover, he says that our mind has evolved in such a way that, despite its mechanically determined nature, it adapts us to our circumstances and environment through "successful reaction external impulses and influences; and in the adoption and acceptance or the repulsion of new elements."(1) In other words, our mind can be compared to a machine that obeys natural laws while also appropriating, assimilating, and molding external stimuli towards its objects of survival and benefit. Lastly, our mind does not only adapt to external stimuli, but also *constructs* "organs" of its own accord in the form of perception, thought, and other concepts and logical constructs. As a consequence of our mind's evolutionary, accommodating and constructive nature, Vaihinger says that

> Thought has fulfilled its purpose when it has elaborated the given sensation-complexes into valid concepts, general judgements and cogent conclusions, and has produced such a world that objective happenings can be calculated and our behavior successfully carried out in relation to phenomena. (2)

Note here that the purpose of thought does not require that we know objective reality absolutely, just that we can calculate events that occur without our intervention. As a mere means to the end

of survival and benefit, considering thought to be an end in itself leads us to impossible questions

and problems such as the existence of the universe or God. Ultimately, the concepts in question

exist because they practically benefit us, as the function of our mind indicates, and have no value

or reality in themselves. However, we still have a long way to go from sensory data to the

highest peaks of logical thought, such as morality and God. The next step on that path comes in

the form of *Thought as an Art, Logic as Technology.*

There is now an important distinction to be made between unconscious and conscious

thought. Vaihinger believes that the process of interpreting sensory data in an adaptive and

constructive way is automatic and unconscious. By contrast, he says that conscious

> Logic is specially concerned to throw light on the dark and unconsciously working
> activity of thought, and to study the ingenious methods and devices which that
> unconscious activity employs in order to attain its object. (7)

Vaihinger emphasizes that logical functions are subjective but useful efforts that rarely have any

demonstrable similarity to their concerned external event or process. To elaborate, he says that

the most important human errors occur when we forget that although agreement of ideas and

judgements with "things-in-themselves" occurs, it does not justify the conclusion that the

processes by which the logical results have been obtained are the same as the objective events.

On the contrary, he points out that their utility is manifested in the very fact that the logical

functions, without corresponding to actual events, do constantly coincide in the end with reality.

1.2 Thought as an Art, Logic as Technology

Having summarized Vaihinger's conception of unconscious thought and its contrast with conscious logic, I will now present a more thorough explanation of logic's nature. In the sense that thought is improved by practice, development, and hereditary transmission, Vaihinger considers thought to be an art. To clarify, he does not mean art in an aesthetic sense, but rather in the sense that whenever a "common natural faculty becomes specialized in such a way that particular individuals practice it with particular dexterity, we call it an art. Certain technical rules are developed: the totality of these rules is called its technology". (9) For Vaihinger, logic is the technology of thought and its purpose is to present and establish thought's technical rules. Throughout the history of mankind we have collected these technical rules and managed to employ them systematically.

> We have succeeded in registering, analyzing and systematically establishing those technical operations and manipulations which are the most frequent, regular, and important. It is the operations whose skilful application, intelligent realization, and rational improvement are essential to the progress of modern science which have been raised from practice into theory and reduced to the simple and primitive forms of the logical function. (9)

Beyond the rules of thought, however, Vaihinger believes that science and philosophy also use artifices of thought. These are the operations of thought that, to an onlooker, appear to be magical, and run counter to ordinary procedure in, to some extent, a paradoxical way. More specifically, these operations are "the fictive activity of the logical function; the products of this activity — *fictions*." (11)

1.3 Fictions

Vaihinger holds that these fictions, or irregularly used mental constructs, exist in virtue of our inability to apply the "logical rules", such as inductive logic, to certain advanced problems and theories. To clarify, he says that

> Fictive activity in logical thought can be understood as the production and use of logical methods, which, with the help of accessory concepts—where the improbability of any corresponding objective is fairly obvious—seek to attain the objects of thought. Instead of remaining content with the material given, the logical function introduces these hybrid and ambiguous thought-structures, in order with their help to attain its purpose indirectly, if the material which it encounters resists a direct procedure. With an instinctive, almost cunning ingenuity, the logical function succeeds in overcoming these difficulties with the aid of its accessory structures. (11-12)

Essentially, his point here is that certain processes, or phenomena, are too complicated or illogical for the use of inductive reasoning, or other direct methods. In these cases, we must use explicitly unreal accessory concepts, or fictions, which despite their paradoxical nature, ultimately coincide with reality in a practical way.

Vaihinger explains that although unreal, the falsity or paradoxical nature of fictions can vary in degree. On one end of the spectrum, *semi-fictions* only contradict, or deviate, from reality. On the other end, *real fictions* are in contradiction with both reality and themselves. Vaihinger says that, connected by transitions, thought begins with "slight initial deviations from reality (semi-fictions), and, becoming bolder and bolder, ends by operating with constructs that are not only opposed to the fact but are self-contradictory." (14)

Further clarifying the nature of fictions, Vaihinger contrasts their nature with that of hypotheses. The ideational construct contained within a hypothesis claims, or hopes, to verifiably correspond with reality. In result, every hypothesis, compelled by the law of causality, endeavors to discover a missing link that will explain some phenomena as its result. By contrast, the purpose of a fiction is different. Rather than hoping to be admitted into what is accepted as real, the fiction serves as a provisional auxiliary construct, hoping to disappear as soon as it has fulfilled its purpose. On one hand, what is untenable as a hypothesis might be extremely useful as a fiction. On the other hand, a fiction might become superfluous over the course of time and require elimination. Finally, while hypotheses attempt to cleanse thought of contradictions, fiction calls contradictions into existence knowingly, and for a specific purpose.

Vaihinger cautions the reader, however, that in the same way that a hypothesis must be verified, a fiction must be justified by the services that it renders, or else be discarded. Furthermore, he warns that in order for a concept to be considered a fiction, it needs to be used with awareness of its falsity; for misinterpreting a fiction as a hypothesis, or dogma, exposes the concept to lethal contradictions.

2. Types of Fictions

While fictions are inherent in the entire structure of cosmic phenomena, from our elementary sensations to our entire world of ideas, we also use them as indispensable tools within science and philosophy. In this section, I will distinguish certain types of Vaihinger's fictions, though limited scope prevents me from listing them all. More specifically, the fictions

described here will constitute the core of vaihinger's metaphysical and epistemological view, and/or relate to the upcoming *Fictions in Contemporary Ethics* section.

2.1 Fundamental Metaphysical and Epistemological Fictions

Beginning with the fictions that constitute the core of Vaihinger's metaphysical and epistemological views, I will describe the fictional components of, and reasoning behind, Vaihinger's *world of sensations* and discuss its epistemological ramifications. In order to explain Vaihinger's argument, I will first need to define and explain the fictions of *unjustified transference[1]*, Kant's *thing-in-itself*, and Kant's *subject-object causal relationship*. At the end, I will define the fiction of *substance* as well.

Unjustified transference's more innocent uses can be found within mathematics, for instance, in aiding the generalization of formulae. Pertinately, unjustified transference has found practical application in metaphysics as well. Vaihinger delineates unjustified transference as an

> Ideational construct in which a relationship extending to two members is ascribed to one
> of them (generally the first), as referring to itself, i.e. where one member is fictively
> doubled. Thus there is "duty to oneself", and causa sui, and similarly sin against oneself
> (to be one's own enemy, etc.). Duty is a relationship of A to B and so is causa. If then A
> is doubled (A = A) then the same relationship can be attributed to A itself alone. (51)

In other words, unjustified transference can be stated, essentially, as an informed and practical redundancy. Exemplifying a practical redundancy, the phrase "write that down" means "write

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[1] The fiction of infinity is also mentioned as a component of unjustified transference

that in writing", but despite the present redundancy, continues to be used for emphasis or indication of content's importance. Vaihinger provides the more complex example, "to have a duty to/for oneself", which is logically synonymous with, "having a part of oneself to/for oneself" because duty must already be an attribute of yourself in order for you to "have" it.

Having explained the definition of unjustified transference, Vaihinger creates an analogy between Descartes' coordinates and Kant's thing-in-itself to show that the fictional nature of the thing-in-itself is a production of unjustified transference combined with the concept of infinity, each of which are less complex fictions. Describing Descartes' mission to bring curved lines under the laws of straight ones, he says that because we consider lines and surfaces to be composed of line and surface elements of infinitely small extension, coordinates allow curved lines to be considered *as if* they were an assemblage of infinitely small straight lines. While curvature can be defined as the degree to which a line deviates from being straight, coordinates infinitely reduce the curvature of curved lines *as if* they have none, resulting in a logical redundancy. In other words, coordinates work practically but can only logically claim to have applied the laws of straight lines onto other straight lines, and shouldnt claim to have completely eliminated all residue of curved lines' non-quantifiable curvature.

Analogously, just as Descartes' attempts to infinitely reduce the curvature of curved lines resulting in logical redundancy, Kant attempts to reduce the world to a relationship between two epistemological coordinates, subject and object. The world is compared to a curved line here, in the sense that the world resists knowledge similarly to how curvature resists quantifiability. Executing Vaihinger's analogy, Kant's solution results in the same type of logical redundancy that can be attributed to all relationships of unjustified transference. Just as curvature cannot be completely reduced by treating curved lines *as if* they were an assemblage of infinitely small

straight lines, it is impossible to completely reduce the world by treating it *as if* it's constituted by sensory data points. While the world can be defined as the things-in-themselves that correspond to our senses, the coordinates of the object and subject infinitely reduce the world *as if* everything can be considered to be sensory data. In other words, the subject and object relationship works practically, removing all the contradictions that arise for sensation, but can only claim to have established a causal relationship between our sensory data and our sensory data. Discussing the resulting contradictions, Vaihinger says

> The attempt to reduce matter and everything to such a relationship leads finally to the assumption that everything we can conceive exists only within us, including causality. But what we conceive is caused by some ["thing-in-itself"]; hence the contradiction in the [thing-in-itself], (i.e it is postulated as an absolute cause whereas the concept of causality is supposed to be purely subjective [according to the thing-in-itself's logical implications]). (53)

Inherent contradictions within the thing-in-itself bring Vaihinger to the standpoint of Hume, adopted in more recent times by Avenarius[2], who says that nothing exists except sensations which we analyze into two poles, subject and object. Vaihinger explains that through this polar analysis we perform an epistemological mapping of the objective sequences and co-existences of sensations. In other words, he considers the polar coordinates of the self and the thing-in-itself to, combined, produce the fiction of an absolute cause which in turn assists the mind in handling the world of sensations.

Vaihinger does not merely claim that sensory data is the only available foundation by which we can generate our perception of reality; in conformity with the logical functions and

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[2] *The Philosophy of 'As If'* (pg. 54 Vaihinger)

categories, he also makes the claim that the mind cuts away portions of, and makes subjective

additions to, sensory data after receiving it.

> From the chaos of sensations emerges differentiated perception. No concept of a
> particular thing is as yet discernible in this chaos, for the vast, vague, nebulous mass of
> sensations only gradually takes on a rotatory movement and only gradually do the
> individual elements that belong together combine to form perceptual objects and
> intuitions of the particular. In intuition we already have a union of sensory data, due to
> the psychical attraction of the elements. The forms in which this union occurs are the
> relations of the whole and its parts, of the thing and its attributes. Here the logical
> function has already begun. (143)

Vaihinger describes these operations as the act of acquiring knowledge, while also pointing out

that in the act of interpreting, or converting, sensory data we also depart from reality by altering

it for our own purposes. Consequently, according to him, even the most elementary logical

processes do not represent "objective reality".

 While Vaihinger claims that thought and reality have an intimate connection and

"constantly reunite", he believes that it is mistaken to search for an explanation, or cause, of their

reunion in the nature of objective existence. Vaihinger argues that we *already* understand the

nature of real events, "as dominated by unalterable regularity"(144). By contrast, he states that

the answer lies within the nature of thought itself, which is linked up with these objective events

in a manner not yet explained. This raises the question: How does it happen that although in

thinking we make use of a falsified reality, the practical result still proves to be right?

 In response, Vaihinger answers that sensory data groups itself and combines into

"thing-and-attributes," and into "whole-and-parts", although these are all merely forms of

perception. Furthermore, he claims that

One single instance of simultaneity or immediate sequence of concepts is no guarantee for the psyche that these sensations belong together and will always recur in the same way, nor is there any reason for assuming this. On the other hand, when there is a frequent recurrence of the same combination of concepts, the psyche feels itself called upon to distinguish this amidst the chaos of sensations. We believe that this would not occur without some practical stimulus, and that it was necessity, in the widest sense of the term, which awakened the tendency to form a special category for this persistent conjunction of concepts. In addition to the material of sensations as such, the time-relations in which they occur, and the rhythm in which the interplay of perceptions and sensations takes place, are also given. In this temporal sequence of sensations, those sensation-units become conspicuous in the stream of perceptions which always recur in the same combinations. (149-150)

For instance, perceptions of landscapes, animals and plants all bombard us with chaotic sensory data, but no matter how the stream of data changes, we can recognize that a certain configuration is always associated with a certain color, for example, the figure of a branching plant with green leaves. There, through the form of the "thing and the attribute" arises the object "tree" and its attribute "green".

At some point, the tree becomes leafless. This thing "leafless tree" now requires us to regard the visible object as a property of an invisible thing (branching plant with green leaves). In this example Vaihinger highlights the shifting and interchangeable nature of our logical categories. From their capacity to change one thing into another (For example, cause and effect, whole and part, reality and appearance) we can see their subjectivity. Furthermore, resulting from unjustified extension of categorical forms, substance can be described as the fiction of an absolute thing-in-itself. More precisely, when one member of the thing-attribute relation, the

thing-in-itself, is illegitimately transferred from the given world to actual reality, this results in

the fiction of substance. In the current case, the tree is a substance because we consider the

tree-ness of the tree to exist despite our contradicting experience of a leafless tree and regardless

of the fact that the only sensations are real. By creating the fiction of a substance to which

sensations are supposed to adhere as attributes,

> thought commits a very serious error. It hypostasizes sensation, which in the last analysis
> is only a process, as a subsistent attribute, and ascribes this "attribute" to a "thing" that
> either exists only in the complex of sensations itself, or has been simply added by thought
> to what has been sensed. We must clearly realize that when thought subsumes a
> sensation-complex under the category of object and attribute it is committing a very great
> mistake. Where is the "sweet" that is ascribed to the sugar? It exists only in the act of
> sensation. Where is the "sugar" that is supposed to be "white," "sweet," "hard", and
> "fine", whose "essence" is supposed to consist in these qualities? Thought, in fact, deals
> with the sensation complex twice, once as Thing and again as Attribute. The succession
> of sensations alone is given and out of these two entirely different conceptual values are
> developed. (152-153)

The development of Vaihinger's epistemological view therefore culminates in his

explanation for our lack of true knowledge, concept of an absolute cause[3], concept of an absolute

thing-in-itself[4] and ability to, despite our lack of objectivity, map consistent sequences and

co-existences as things and their attributes, causes and their effects, wholes and their parts, etc…

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[3] Subject-object causal relation
[4] Substance

2.2 Artificial Classification and Heuristic Fictions

In virtue of Vaihinger's metaphysics and epistemology, it is evident that all entities are presented in certain configurations or sequences of sensations that can be theoretically expressed in some system of classification. Vaihinger states that when these categorical specifications perfectly correspond with reality, the system of classification can be called a "natural system". Simply put, a natural system must correspond to the actual forms and mutual relationship of all things. The actual forms and mutual relationships of entities are extremely complex and difficult to discern, necessitating the use of a semi-fiction called artificial classification. According to Vaihinger, artificial classes provisionally substitute correct classifications for others which do not directly correspond to reality, then operate *as if* these fictional classes are the real ones. He says that

> These provisional classificatory aids not only serve the practical purpose of permitting objects to be arranged and brought under definite rubrics, and provide at the same time a sort of mnemonic device, but they also possess a theoretical value, in so far as they perform a heuristic service by preparing for and facilitating the discovery of a natural system. Artificial systems are generally based on these concepts of species, which themselves only bring a superficial order provisionally into the confused mass of phenomena. (15)

Note that as long as semi-fictions are treated as hypotheses without realization of their nature, they are false hypotheses. This method is only valuable if it is realized that these classes

and systems have been deliberately constructed as provisional, or heuristic, representations which make room for better and more natural systems at a future point.

Having explained the heuristic use of artificial classification, I will provide Vaihinger's explanation for why certain fictions are particularly heuristically helpful. Extra-heuristic fictions typically assume an unreal cause for the sake of explaining complex real events. Vaihinger claims that when "this has been systematically worked out, not only is order brought to the phenomenon but the ground is prepared for the correct solution of the problem; and for this reason the method has heuristic value" (35) Furthermore, even after being discarded as insufficient or mistaken, these unreal assumptions can continue to perform heuristic service. Crucially, artificial classification can overlap with the assumption of an unreal cause. In these cases, the resultantly fictional system serves doubly to provide a systemically categorical account of entities that are brought under a definite rubric[5].

Potentially self-critically, Vaihinger leaves the door open for some assumptions, or axioms, that he holds to eventually sink to the level of hypotheses and by extension, fictions. He points out that such

> gradual degradation has, in fact, frequently occurred. Even in mathematics or mathematical physics these pillars are now being shaken, and it is not at all unlikely that elements may here be shown to be fictional that have hitherto been regarded as axiomatic. (37-38)

This open door raises questions about Vaihinger's fundamental axiom which posits that the mind's function is evolutionary. Should Vaihinger consider his *Philosophy of As If* to be an artificial classification and/or heuristic fiction? In the section, *Defense of the Philosophy of 'As*

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[5] See Grounding section

If', I will further discuss the gradual degradation of axioms, the question above, and their possible ramifications for Vaihinger's work.

2.3 Abstractive Neglective Fictions and Abstract Concepts

Previously, I have established that it is extremely difficult to find the correct sequence and co-existence of sensations that correspond to certain phenomena. Solving, or avoiding, this problem, abstractive neglective fictions can be defined as the methods for which the deviation from reality is found in the neglect of certain elements. These fictions are formed due to the extreme amount and complexity of their related facts and causal factors. The mind, unable to handle the large number of components and factors, deploys an artifice that "provisionally and temporarily neglects a number of characters and selects from them the more important phenomena." (16)

Adam Smith's system of political economy is a deployment of one such artifice. Quantifiable manifestations of human actions are extremely complicated and nearly impossible to understand theoretically, reducing them to causal factors. It was essential, however, that Adam Smith interpret human activity causally for his system to be useful. The main cause that he wanted to focus on was egoism and therefore, he configured his assumption in such a way that all human actions, especially those of a business or politico-economical type, could be considered *as if* their only cause was only egoism. He neglected every one of the subsidiary causes and partially conditional factors, but with the aid of this fiction, succeeded in bringing political economy into a system.

In the same sense that we can abstractly neglect, we can also abstractly construct. In abstract constructions, or ideas, we take dependent factors of reality, such as sweetness, redness, space, causality etc… as substantive, although it is realized that this is only a fictitious, unreal form. Vaihinger references Condillac concerning abstraction who says that

> To abstract…, is to decompose; it is to separate one thing from another of which it forms an integral part. Abstract concepts are therefore partial concepts, torn from their context. By logically abstracting color or form from its corporeal substratum, we get special branches of sciences which are concerned only with these qualities, apart from the substances in which alone they manifest themselves. (187)

Vaihinger argues that converting abstractions into realities, regarding them as substances, or in other words, hypothesizing them, causes the mind to contradict itself. On one hand, the mind regards these modifications without any relation to the real object to which it corresponds. On the other hand, despite abstractions only existing in virtue of their object, the mind treats them as things-in-themselves because non-existence cannot be comprehended. Simply put, the fiction of abstract concepts occurs when dependent and partial attributes are complimented by the fiction of substance.

2.4 Symbolic/Analogical Fictions

Symbolic fictions are another widespread building block of theology, epistemology and metaphysics. Analogical fictions serve as the mechanism of thinking which, upon interpreting a new sense-impression, constructs a relationship between the current sequence/configuration and

those that have already been observed." (24) According to Vaihinger, all knowledge, if it goes

beyond simple actual succession and co-existence, can only be *analogical*. His reasoning for this

claim is the fact that all cognition stems from the interpretation of one thing, sensory data,

through another, subjective interpretation/categories. Recall that in order to comprehend sensory

data we automatically add/subtract from its content, distancing the sense-impressions from their

originally objective form. Essentially,

> We can only say that objective phenomena can be regarded *as if* they behaved in such and
> such a way, and there is absolutely no justification for assuming any dogmatic attitude
> and changing the "as if "into a "that." As soon as these analogies are interpreted as
> hypotheses we get all those systems of theology and philosophy whose object is the
> explanation of the resulting contradictions… Of still greater interest are the endless
> attempts to determine the nature of substance and its relation to its attributes, of cause and
> its relation to effect, etc…

In later sections, I will thoroughly discuss some of the contemporary theological and

philosophical arguments that attempt to compensate for the resulting contradictions of

hypothesizing a fiction. I will also discuss a contemporary attempt to determine the nature of

substance and its relation to its attributes.

2.5 Summational, Nominal and Substitutive Fictions

Summational, nominal and substitutive fictions all constitute abbreviations by means of

auxiliary words. A whole series of well-known concepts, such as "soul," "force," the various

"psychical faculties," etc… belong here. Although these conceptual constructs were formerly,

and are still, regarded as expressions for real and existing entities, they are truly just summational expressions for a series of interconnected phenomena and interconnected processes.

Similarly, when we use a thing's name, we simply indicate that the object bundles certain attributes, acting as though this summation were something outside of and apart from the attributes. Such a concept has no value other than the practical value of bringing together the many phenomena/processes and simplifying the method of expression. Essentially, no more is stated in these nominal fictions than what the single phenomena could tell us themselves, and if we believe that we have understood or actually said anything in using these words, we are simply forgetting that these expressions are purely tautological. Vaihinger says that

> Such words represent mere husks holding together and preserving the real kernel. And just as the external shell takes on the form of the kernel and provides us with a duplicate of it, so these auxiliary words are to be taken as pure logical repetitions without any true value. (197)

Furthermore, a substitution occurs in these verbal expressions in which the summational phrase takes the place of a real particular. This substitutional method is useful as a convenient aid, and in a broad way, all fictions may be regarded as substitutions because they provisionally put an unreal element in the place of reality. In the narrow sense of the term, however, these include all substitutions wherein an idea functions vicariously as a symbol for something else.

3-5. Preface for Fictions in Contemporary Ethics

Before I begin to discuss and illustrate the presence, and use, of fictional components in contemporary ethics, note Vaihinger's specification that, for a concept to be considered a fiction its nature must be acknowledged as fictional. Accordingly, some of the examples that I use below technically exemplify logical contradictions rather than fictions. Nonetheless, For the purposes of clarity and simplicity, when I describe an account's use/composition of a particular "fiction", I am actually just suggesting that the author *should* consider the concept to be a fiction. I am not claiming that the author necessarily acknowledges their use of the concept as a fiction.

3. Fictions in God

Beginning with theology, I first reference the fictions within sections **2-2.5** for the purpose of explaining God's fictional components, contradictions and self-contradictions. Clarifying Vaihinger's theological view, I then define theological realism, antirealism and Vaihinger's fictionalism. Subsequently, I respond to some arguments against the fictionalist interpretation of theology, proving that they fail to reject Vaihinger's fictionalist conception of God. Lastly, I argue that despite being ontologically non-existent, God is still practically useful.

3.1 God as a Fiction and Fictional Components

Characterized as an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good entity, God is a *real fiction* that contradicts both reality and himself. While he cannot be reduced simply to abstractions or analogies alone, in this section I will explain some of his fictional components and contradictions. Before discussing God's self contradiction, I begin with his unreal features.

God's qualities of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect morality, represent several contradictions with reality. Firstly, many of these contradictions are caused by the use of the fiction of *infinity*. Simply put, when God is described as being infinitely powerful, his power is considered to be simultaneously without end and yet complete, which is logically contradictory. Likewise, this contradiction applies when infinitely attributing other qualities, when God is said to be everywhere, and when God is said to have existed for all of time.

Secondly, some of God's contradictions are due to *symbolic* and/or *personificatory* fictions. In the case of God's omniscience, or his ability to think, we paint God *as if* he thinks like us because we can't grasp any other alternative. In a similar vein, we typically think of God's omnipotence in terms of human force, or energy.

Lastly, the fiction of *absolute substance*, and by extension the fiction of *substance*, cause their own contradictions within God. Concerning God's particular substance, when we take God's essence to exist regardless of his attributes, this contradicts the fact that the term "God" is merely a valueless shell which serves the purpose of bundling his attributes together. Concerning God's absolute substance, when he is described as a fundamental entity or uncaused cause, it merely combines the contradictions within the fictions of infinity and substance.

God's attributes are not just contradictory, they are also self-contradictory. I will show this to be the case using God's attributes of perfect freedom/power and perfect goodness. While freedom might plausibly be compatible with restriction, as long as one's goals align with that restriction, *perfect freedom* should be considered in a different way. By definition, absolute freedom must infinitely reduce the restrictions of the agent, including those of self determination. By contrast, in order to be perfectly good God must have infinitely restricted self-determination. Simply put, for God to have perfect freedom and perfect goodness, he is self-contradictory.

3.2 Theological Realism, Antirealism and Fictionalism

In this section, I will first distinguish between theological realism, antirealism and Vaihinger's fictionalism. Using Vaihinger's fictionalism, I then address, and respond to, Ekstrom and Blackburn's arguments against an antirealist interpretation of theology/God[6].

Theological realism can be defined by Ekstrom's description of Michael Rea's view[7]. Rea says that realism *about an entity like God*, is a commitment to its ontological existence. Realism *in a field like theology,* however, involves interpreting the canonical statements of theories or doctrines in that field realistically. By contrast, antirealism can be defined as the view that God is a construct, or helpful fiction, who's existence requires no ontological commitments. Similarly, though, antirealism can be applied to a field like theology.

Like antirealism, fictionalism holds that God's relation to humans is internal and that his nature is fictional. Fictionalism takes the view a step further, however, by arguing that the concept of God is not only fictional but necessary and regulative. Moreover, Vaihinger holds that God's fictional nature should not be considered a deficiency due to his practical usefulness as an auxiliary moral construct.

To clarify my position, I apply Vaihinger's fictionalism both to the field of theology and the entity of God. In other words, I believe that we should interpret religious texts as something like anthropomorphically expressed ideals, and that God is a helpful construct that requires no ontological commitments. I infer that, alternatively, Ekstrom would describe herself as a realist

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[6] *God, Suffering, and the Value of Free Will*. Laura W. Ekstrom, Oxford University Press (2021). © Oxford University Press. (The arguments in question can be found in chapter 7, Religion on the Cheap)
[7] Ekstrom 2021, 191.

towards the field of theology, but an antirealist about the entity of God. Simply put, she probably believes that we should interpret religious texts as ontological claims, but also believes that God is an ontologically non-existent construct.

3.3 Rejection of Antirealist Theology: Fictionalist Response

As has been described previously throughout this work, it is clear that scientific fields knowingly use fictional concepts for their practical benefits at times. Analogously, I believe that science's conscious application of fictional concepts can apply in respect to God.

On the contrary, Ekstrom and Blackburn argue that science and religion are disanalogous. For the sake of fully understanding Ekstrom's position, this is an excerpt from Howard Wettstein, the philosopher to whom Ekstrom originally directs her arguments, that describes the type of analogy in question.

> [Wettstein directs] attention to other domains of human reflection and knowledge in which we get along quite well in the absence of clarity about what is in some sense fundamental…[He says,] "Who is going to question the integrity of mathematics just because its epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings are less than entirely understood? . . . My attitude to religion and religious practice has similarities to the case of mathematics. . . . To say that we should not start with metaphysical questions or… that the usual supernaturalist religious metaphysics provides a misleading picture of what the game is all about, is not to diminish the central role of God in religious life." (199- 200, Ekstrom)

In response to Wettsttein's analogy, Ekstrom warns that we should be resistant to antirealist construals of religious claims. She contends that religious claims are used to justify

behavior and attitudes that affect others; implying that these justifications rely on the ontological

existence of God and that science does not. Ekstrom says that, for example, "religious claims

affect some people's stance on the morality of abortion and motivate their work for [its] legal

prohibitions." According to Ekstrom, it seems intellectually disreputable for one to take an action

that is motivated by religious sentiment despite denying God's ontological existence. She also

references Blackburn, who raises the same issue in the form of religious claim's appeal to divine

authority. He says that one cannot "cite an 'as if' in the same justificatory or explanatory role as

the original appeal to the deity." For instance, one cannot amplify their demand for your land just

by announcing that it is 'as if' God had given it to them.

    In sum, Ekstrom and Blackburn's point is that religious claims justify behavior and

attitudes that affect others. They imply and argue that these claims necessarily rely on the

ontological existence of God, which is not the case of scientific claims. If Ekstrom and

Blackburn are right, the fictionalist would be making justifications for behaviors that necessarily

require the justifier to believe in the ontological existence of God, making them irrational.

    In response, I agree with Ekstrom that the existence of God provides justifications for

behaviors and attitudes, and that scientific theories don't rely on God's existence. In actuality, the

whole point of the analogy is that scientific theories rely on the existence of *other* fictional

concepts rather than God. For example, it wouldn't make sense to require a mathematician to

believe in the ontological existence of imaginary numbers in order to avoid being intellectually

disreputable. If we conceive God, analogously to imaginary numbers, as being a fictional entity

through which one can regulate their behavior *as if* their conscience constituted divine

judgements from a perfect being, I don't think that it would be intellectually disreputable for one

to adopt a certain stance through that framework. They could still be wrong, maybe because they

don't know all of the facts around abortion, for example, but it would still be a rational method by which one justifies their behavior using God.

Furthermore, let's consider Blackburn's divine command example. Using a fictionalist conception of God, perhaps it *would* make sense for one to amplify their demand for your land by announcing that it is 'as if' God had given it to them. For example, if one perceived your land to be unjustly stolen from them, and their conscience demanded, *as if* by divine decree, that you return their land.

Lastly on the topic of this analogy, Ekstrom raises another of Blackburn's points that, unlike mathematics, religion is not autonomous from philosophy. He argues that

> Unlike mathematics, religion is not autonomous from philosophy, since it both "purports to deliver philosophical results, for instance about the immortality of the soul, or the nature of free- will, or the notion of substance" and also tries to support itself by philosophical arguments for the existence of God. "When it does either of these things, it cannot at the same time claim immunity from philosophical criticism."

In response to this point, I certainly agree with Blackburn that religion is not autonomous from philosophy. Nonetheless, I also question and doubt his implication that mathematics or other scientific fields claim immunity from, or even avoid, philosophical criticism. In fact, our current analogy can easily be interpreted as a philosophical critique, or analysis, of mathematics' epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings.

After giving a more thorough explanation of what fictionalism actually intends to compare through an analogy between religion and science, we can clearly see that while religion may be incomparable to science in certain ways, as described by Ekstrom and Blackburn, the

analogy remains valid in respect to practically using God, or other fictional concepts, despite their falsity.

Now introducing Ekstrom's second argument against antirealism, she begins by acknowledging that God's existence serves as an explanation for why people should behave well towards others, why all people have equal value, and why the world contains beauty, order and love. etc… Ekstrom then asks

> Is it sensible to suggest that we should treat others well because it is *as if* there is a God who sees everything we do and who wants us to be virtuous? Are [these types of] statements akin to saying that molecules combine in certain ways *as if* there were hooks and eyes on them: we should respect the dignity of persons because it is *as if* there is a God who made every human being intrinsically valuable; people are loving toward each other because it is *as if* God exists and draws them together; [etc..] (204)

To these questions about fictionalism, her response is that appealing to a fiction still significantly undermines the force of the antirealist's claims due to their contradictory nature. Once again she references Blackburn who expresses that one cannot both say that they believe that your baby was brought by fairies, and that they don't believe in fairies.

Essentially, Ekstrom and Blackburn's argument here is that even if a fictionalist's claim is reasonable - maybe we should treat others well because our conscience acts *as if* it is a perfect God telling us to do so - that using the concept of God without believing in God still weakens the fictionalist position. In response and drawing on Vaihinger, I will point out that a fictionalist conception of God should not be judged using the same standards that we use to consider hypotheses.

Having already distinguished hypotheses from fictions in section **1.3**, I will just mention that, while hypotheses attempt to cleanse thought of contradictions, fiction calls contradictions into existence knowingly, and for a specific purpose. Specifically considering God, Vaihinger argued that plausibly

> the poverty of language in primitive times, the pleasure derived from short, pregnant, rhetorically effective sentences, and consideration for the less educated, childlike minds of his hearers, led, or rather misled, the founders of religions into expressing in the linguistic form of a dogma what they themselves took only in the sense of a conscious fiction. And according to the "law of ideational shifts,"... the conscious fiction of the master became transformed into the unconscious dogma of the disciples. Christ taught: God is our father in heaven. He probably meant: You must regard God (whose existence for Christ was, of course, not a fiction but a dogma), as if, just as though, he were your father and as if, just as though, he were present in the heavens as a constant external observer of your actions. (p. 242).

Assuming that God was originally used with conscious awareness of his fictional nature, we must also consider whether the use of God is justified in order to establish him as a fiction. Just like the case of mathematicians who use imaginary numbers, I don't think that *everyone* must find a fiction to be practically useful in order for it to be justifiable. In this case, you could say that only those with a special interest in a tool for regulating their behavior find God to be useful. I sometimes feel an internal struggle between doing what is convenient or pleasurable, and doing what my conscience tells me is absolutely morally correct. In these situations, I have the tendency to consider the idea that despite the lack of affect, or perceptibility, that my actions may have, I will always be able to judge myself based upon whether I violated my own moral intuitions. This capacity for self judgment is synonymous with a fictionalist conception of God,

as a symbol of perfection, and provides an auxiliary device that allows one's conscience to be treated *as if* its moral intuitions were divinely perfect commands. This fictionalist conception of God serves the practical purpose of self regulation while also acknowledging its internal contradictions, therefore giving us God's benefits without requiring any difficult ontological commitments.

4. Fictions in Free Will

In this section, I will discuss and analyze the presence, and use, of fictions within contemporary accounts of free will. First, I give an account of Vaihinger's conception of causation and freedom, as a contrast for contemporary event-causal indeterminism. Secondly, I explain Ekstrom's account of event-causal indeterminism itself. Lastly, I argue that the fictions of freedom, indeterminism and the self, are all present in, and instrumental for, event-causal indeterminism.

4.1 Vaihinger's Fictionalist Account of Causation

In this section, I will begin with a description of Vaihinger's account of causation before moving into an explanation and extension of Vaihinger's account of free will. In line with Vaihinger's neo-Kantian nature, he takes causality to be an *analogous fiction*, *unjustified extension*, *tautology* and *subjective category* (note that these conditions are not mutually exclusive and often overlap). For Vaihinger, the law of causation amounts to the expectation that one phenomenon will be immediately and necessarily followed by another, given our continuous

observation of this fact (determinism). Applied as a law, he describes causation as an "analogical fiction" because, assuming determinism to be correct, the relation of will to action is validly analogous to a sequence of unalterable events, but the *actual equation* of the two is contradictory. Regarding causation's application to actual reality, If Vaihinger is right that sensations compose essential reality, then their reduction, together with space, matter etc… to the impact of some unknown object, is an unjustified extension of the concept of cause and effect because causation depends upon our observation.

Furthermore, as an abstract concept, Vaihinger considers causality to be a tautology and, ultimately, just a word. He says that previously, when we applied the concept of causation to something it was then regarded as understood. By contrast, now a word of this sort is merely considered to preserve and hold together its concept's essential content. The word causation will always adjust itself to its content, simply reflecting it as an external counterpart. Thus, causation is a tautology in that it repeats the concept's essential facts under another guise. Vaihinger claims that most of what seems puzzling arises from trifling with the mere forms and shells of knowledge.

Finally and most importantly, applied as a subjective category, causation allows us to act *as if* we fully understand our interpretations of sensory data that are consistently sequential in the same ways. Adding the Kantian "thing in itself", we can even act *as if* we can apply causation to actual reality, or the world of sensation. When we, as Kant did, reduce space, time and everything else to a system of coordinates of cause and effect, object and subject, the whole world as we perceive it appears to be understood as an effect, its corresponding cause being things in themselves, or actual reality (sensory data).

Concerning the nature of freedom now, Vaihinger says that "human actions are regarded as free, and therefore as "responsible" and contrasted with the "necessary" course of natural events." (39) I interpret the positive definition of Vaihinger's sense of freedom to be something like the capacity for the agent themself, rather than predetermined desires, preferences, or any other mental state, to be the cause of their choices and actions. Crucially, he points towards this account of free will as exemplifying a self-contradicting fiction, meaning that free will contradicts both *reality* and *itself.* In his chapter *Practical (Ethical) Fictions* Vaihinger seems to take freedom's status as a self-contradicting fiction for granted, focusing more on the ramifications of this conclusion. For the sake of comparison to Ekstrom's contemporary view, however, I will attempt to more fully flesh out his reasoning here. First I will explain freedom's deviation from reality, then I will discuss its self contradiction.

Beginning with deviation from reality, Vaihinger simply says that freedom "contradicts observation which shows that everything obeys unalterable laws."(39) I take this to mean that he believes that determinism, the idea that there is only one physically possible future at any given moment, leaves no room for an agent to be the sole cause of their decision or action. Furthering the extent of freedom's deviation from reality, freedom is usually taken to require the existence of a self-determined agent. Vaihinger rejects this notion, though, saying that

> By the term "psyche"[, or agent,] we do not understand a substance, but the organic whole of all so-called "mental" actions and reactions; these never come under external observation, but have to be partly inferred from physical signs, partly observed by the so-called inner sense. Psychical actions and reactions are, like every event known to us, necessary occurrences; that is to say, they result with compulsory regularity from their conditions and causes. (1)

Moreover, as he alludes in the above excerpt, Vaihinger also rejects the notion of the self as a substance. He references Nietzsche who says

> "we place ourselves as a unity in the midst of this self-fashioned world of images, as that which abides in the midst of change. But it is an error" XI, 185. He says pertinently in XI, 291 that the ego[, or psyche/agent/self,] "is an attempt to see and to understand our infinitely complicated nature in a simplified fashion—an image to represent a thing". That is the "original error" XII, 26. Nietzsche also recognizes the distinction between Thing-in-itself and Appearance as an artificial one and consequently as a conceptual invention: "the true essence of things is an invention of the conceiving being, without which it would not be able to represent things to itself" XII, 22 and V, 294. The entire phenomenal world [including our sense of self] is a conception "spun out of intellectual errors" (323)

In sum, what these two excerpts illustrate is that superficially, freedom deviates from reality in ignoring the fact that our minds abide by the law of causation. More deeply though, the identification of our mind as our *self* contradicts the reality of constant sensory chaos and flux, despite providing a means of practical understanding and a standpoint amidst the chaos.

4.2 Fictionalist Account of Free Will and Morality

Continuing to the topic of freedom's self contradiction and the ramifications that this contradiction has on morality, Vaihinger claims that an "absolutely free, chance act, resulting from nothing, is ethically just as valueless as an absolutely necessary one."(39) I interpret his claim as meaning that once we establish freedom to be deviant from reality (a fiction), its practical use, rather than being a hypothesis, is for moral responsibility. Moreover, using freedom

for the purpose of moral judgment (even as a fiction: *as if* people's decisions are made freely) is self-contradictory because if we were absolutely free of reasons, or determinants, our decisions would remain un-judgeable, as they would come to be by pure chance.

Therefore, it appears that in actuality, we treat ourselves and others *as if* their decisions were made simultaneously freely *and* not freely. Putting aside indeterministic causation, which is impossible on Vaihinger's view, he is pointing out here that because we need to have had a motive for committing a crime in order to be morally judged, or ethically punished, we act *as if* that motive determines our crime; while simultaneously acting *as if* the crime was self-determined and could have been otherwise. Note that Vaihinger does not take this to indicate that free-will, or moral responsibility, is meaningless. Rather, he says that

> our judgment of our fellow-men is… so completely bound up with this ideational construct (free will) that we can no longer do without it. In the course of their development, men have formed this important construct from immanent necessity, because only on this basis is a high degree of culture and morality possible. But this does not prevent our realizing that it is itself a logical monstrosity, a contradiction; in a word, only a fiction and not an hypothesis. (39)

Later I will further discuss free will as a practical fiction, arguing that, alongside God, it is necessary and helpful for self regulation. Beyond that, I will discuss the idea that freedom grounds our sense of culture as well as our legal system, and that in this way is also necessary and helpful for societal regulation.

4.3 Event-causal Indeterminism

In order to explain indeterminism, the negation of determinism, and more precisely, the event-causal account that Ekstrom proposes in her paper *Toward a plausible event-causal indeterminist account of free will*[8], I must start with determinism. Determinism can be defined as "the thesis that at every moment, there is exactly one physically possible future, where a physically possible future is one that is consistent with the actual past and laws of nature." (Ekstrom 2019) By contrast, while the thesis of indeterminism can be stated simply as the negation of determinism, her positive formulation of indeterminism is as follows: It is not the case that every event is causally necessitated by prior events and the laws of nature. Ultimately, she thinks that

> The crucial matter concerning indeterministic causation, whichever theory best captures its nature, is that, if there is such a thing, then some events are causally related to their effects without necessitating them. Events that indeterministically cause other events make a difference for those effects, but the effects might not have occurred, in the same circumstances and holding fixed the natural laws. It can happen that the events in question occur but are causally inert: they occur, but the effects they might have brought about, they do not (this time) bring about. An indeterministic or nonnecessitating cause is one that can fail to produce its effect, even without the intervention of anything to frustrate it. (130)

After providing some background context on indeterminism, and establishing that event-causal indeterminism does not depend upon the absence of deterministic causation, Ekstrom turns directly to addressing the nature of free will. Overall, she presents two accounts of free will. The first account, she had already presented in earlier work. (Ekstrom 2000, 2003, 2011) The second account, she presents now as a revised version of the first, intending to resolve recent objections

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[8] Ekstrom, L.W. Toward a plausible event-causal indeterminist account of free will. *Synthese* **196**, 127–144 (2019).

by broadening its conception of the self. In this section, I will explain Ekstrom's first account and its problems/objections, continuing on to explain how her revisions solve those problems, then finishing with her fully defined second account.

To begin, Ekstrom explains that her, and every other, account of free will can be plausibly construed as aiming to capture two central features, namely self-direction and alternative possibilities. Regarding self-direction, she says "the thought is that free acts are directed by the agent herself —they derive from her self or from who she is. A natural starting place in developing the idea of self-direction is to say that free acts are the ones an agent does because she wants to and not because she is compelled, coerced, or forced to do them." (132) Responding to a couple of the general problems that face this starting place, that animals act on desire despite not having free will, and the fact that people are alienated from certain desires that they have, Ekstrom gives her own perspective on how we can coherently account for self-direction using her particular formation of the self. In her original account, she describes the self as comprised of *preferences* and *acceptances* "that cohere together in a network of mutually supporting attitudes". As Ekstrom defines them, preferences are desires that one forms or maintains as one aims to desire what is good, and acceptances are beliefs formed with the aim of assenting to what is true. Furthermore, she says that actions that derive, even deterministically, from a network of mutually supporting attitudes that represent one's "core self" are self-determined. Regarding the other feature of any account of free will - alternative possibilities, Ekstrom came to the conclusion that "What counted was that it was not rigged from the start who we turned out to be… we should have the chance to be other than the sorts of people we are." Working alternative possibilities into her view, she argues that indeterministically caused preferences allow for a self to have been other than it is, because their preferences are not the inevitable outcome of natural

laws and prior events. Bringing both self-determination and alternative possibilities together, we

get Ekstrom's first account (1) of free will:

1) **Free Action As Action on Undefeated Authorized Preference** [states that] An agent's
   act is free just in case the act results by a normal (non-deviant) causal process from the
   agent's undefeated authorized preference for the act. A preference has undefeated
   authorization just in case the agent's evaluative faculty was neither coerced nor causally
   determined by anything to form that preference, but rather the preference was
   indeterminately caused by the considerations that were brought to bear in the agent's
   deliberation. (2000, pp. 108–109)

Regarding Ekstrom's reasoning for the decision to revise account 1, she first concludes that this

account may fail to explain why we are considered to be morally responsible for actions that are

not caused by our preferences, for example, actions that we are alienated from or would prefer to

have not taken. Her second, more pressing, reason for creating a revised account, is that account

1 produces unintended ramifications, which stem from the fact that active formation of

preference cannot itself be a free act. For context, the reason that the formation of a preference

cannot be self determined is because Ekstrom defines self-determination as the quality of being

caused by preferences. If preferences were self-determined, preferences would be necessary in

order to form preferences, creating an infinite regress. For this reason, Ekstrom's view is that the

agent's preferences, aka one's sense of self, are not self-determined, but could have been

otherwise because they are indeterminately caused. Problematically however, the separation of

self determination and alternative possibilities into two stages ramifies a resulting "free action"

that is self-determinately caused by preferences, but also has no alternative possibilities, as one's

preferences necessarily cause exactly one decision or action. Essentially, the problem is that

"there is no single act that is both self-determined and could have been otherwise." (Ekstrom 2019)

In response to this objection, Ekstrom explains that she needs to revise her account in order to explain *directly* free actions, the freedom of which is not derived from prior free actions, that are self-determined and also have possible alternatives. More precisely, she says

> On the alternative account I wish to explore here, in a case of directly free action (that is, an action the freedom of which does not derive from an earlier free action), the act is caused nondeviantly and indeterministically by certain kinds of agent-involving events, namely, attitudes of hers—such as preferences, acceptances, desires, values, intentions, and beliefs—which provide a reasons explanation of the act, and, furthermore, the act is not the result of compulsion, manipulation, or coercion for which the agent herself has not freely arranged. (136)

For account 2, this revision solves the infinite regress problem, and accounts for directly free action, by shifting the nature of one's self and therefore the definition of self-determination. Rather than being constituted solely by preferences and acceptances, the self is now represented by an agent's wide variety of reasons including, but not limited to, agential attitudes such as preferences. Furthermore, In order for an action to be self-determined it must be indeterminately caused by an agent's reasons, meaning that preference formation can be indeterminately caused by *other* types of agential reasons - which eliminates the regress of preference formations. Finally, having broadened the self-direction component of freedom over that of account 1, we can now define Ekstrom's account (2) of free will:

Directly Free Action as Action Indeterministically and Non-deviantly Caused by Reasons of the Agent's Own [states that] A decision or other act is directly free just in case it is caused non-deviantly and indeterministically by reasons of the agent's—such as convictions, desires, values, beliefs, and preferences—and other reasonable compatibilist conditions on free action are met, including that the act is not compelled and is not the result of (non-self-arranged) manipulation or coercion. An agent's performing a directly free act requires that it be open to her at the time not to perform that action, either by performing an alternative act right then or by not performing any action at all right then.

Despite revising her first account, Ekstrom claims that both of her accounts share the same advantages over other accounts of free will. More specifically, they share advantages over event-causal accounts that place indeterministic causation *after* an agent attempts to act, and also agent-causal accounts that unnecessarily appeal to primitive substance causation. Additionally, she says that they withstand common objections to indeterminist event-causal theories, such as the problems of chance, randomness, accidentality, and the disappearing agent problem. Later on, after I explain Vaihinger's view, I will discuss Ekstrom's claims about account comparison and the disappearing agent problem within the context of his framework.

4.4 Fiction of Indeterminism

For some background pertaining to Vaihinger's self-criticism, I will first summarize his definition for heuristic fictions from section **2.2**. Heuristic fictions involve the assumption of unreal causes for the purpose of explaining a complex of real events. Vaihinger claims that when "this has been systematically worked out, not only is order brought to the phenomenon but the

ground is prepared for the correct solution of the problem; and for this reason the method has heuristic value" (35). Frequently, these unreal causes also continue to be useful after they are replaced.

My point here is that in Vaihinger's conception of causation, determinism is a generally assumed axiom of causation. Therefore, Vaihinger also believes that it is an open question whether determinism will survive the passage of science. Consequently, if indeterminism *is* the more tenable, and empirically verifiable, axiom, then determinism will have been sunk to the level of heuristic fiction. Note that this does not change Vaihinger's holistic view very much at all, because sequences of sensory data are still the unchanging causes of our perceptual world, albeit not *necessarily* unchanging. Ekstrom also says that under indeterminism, our actions could still plausibly be determinately caused. Even if our actions are indeterminately caused, and given that his illusionary view of the self is not affected by indeterminism, free will still deviates from reality under Vaihinger's view because there is no "agent" to have willed it.

Having mentioned that Vaihinger could be wrong in his axiomatic view of determinism[9], I would still like to progress under the assumption that determinism is the more tenable assumption. Addressing Ekstrom's radioactive material example: I think that while Vaihinger might agree that we can interpret radioactive material's seemingly spontaneous decay as being indeterminate, due to its unverifiability, we could also interpret its spontaneous cause as being an unknown determinant. Holding the view that actual reality can never be known, the latter interpretation seems more practical because observably determinant causation underlies all aspects of our perception of reality.

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[9] Gisin N. Indeterminism in physics and intuitionistic mathematics. *Synthese*. (2021)

Therefore, under the assumption that determinism is more tenable, let's consider how Vaihinger might treat Ekstrom's application of indeterminist causation. In his view, causally indeterminate "reasons" would be considered to be fictions. In order to explain their nature, let's briefly return to Vaihinger's treatment of God. He says that when a fiction (God) is hypothesized or dogmatized, other subsidiary fictions are constructed that help compensate for that fiction's apparent contradictions. For example, concepts like heaven or karma serve as subsidiary fictions that compensate for the contradiction between God's perfectly powerful and good nature and the existence of evil and suffering in the world. In the case of free will then, Ekstrom's postulated axiom of indeterminism serves to justify the unreal cause, or fiction, of indeterministically causal "reasons of the agent" thus neutralizing freedom's contradiction with determinism.

To elaborate on this, my crucial problem with indeterminism is similar to one that is often directed towards agent-causalists. Agent-causalist's agent-as-a-substance captures our feeling of being the ultimate cause of our decisions, but at the great cost of being opposed to empirical findings about humans. Similarly, if determinism is the more tenable axiom, Ekstrom makes this same sacrifice in order to capture our feeling of having alternate possibilities. In conclusion, as is the fate of all subsidiary fictions and also the fiction for which they compensate, we should say that the application of indeterminate causation to an "agent's reasons" deviates from reality.

4.5 The Self and the Disappearing Agent Problem

In this section, I want to discuss Ekstrom's conception of the self and her handling of the disappearing agent problem (DAP), which I think evidences certain general claims that Vaihinger makes about fictions. In the end, I will claim that Ekstrom's view does not cause the self to disappear, but that she does characterize it in a way that she may want to avoid. I also claim that

other free will accounts are not better in this regard, and that "we should not permit ourselves to be misled or disturbed by the contradictions of the fiction with the world of experience or its inconsistency with itself".

Before I discuss these interactions, it will be necessary to recount Ekstrom's conception of the self, define the DAP, and analyze Ekstrom's response. Starting with the nature of Ekstrom's agent, she says "we might call the agent's evaluating and choosing faculty or faculties her intellect and will, so that an agent—as a matter of her moral or psychological identity, her self—is understood as her intellect, will, and character-defining attitudes." (133) Ekstrom refers to Randolph Clarke here in the form of a footnote:

> Clarke writes, "(contrary to what Ekstrom implies) human agents are no more constituted by these mental states and capacities than they are by the states and capacities of their circulatory systems" (2003, p. 62). But the project is not to give a metaphysical account of personal identity. Perhaps as a matter of metaphysics a person is a human animal. At issue here, instead, is the question of which attitudes, events, and powers or faculties comprise the self in that they are agent-involving in the production of free action.

I bring up Clarke because in noting Clarke's perspective, and pointing out that Ekstrom describes her conception of self as "functional" or "psychological", Ekstrom appears to consider that, to some extent, she does misrepresent the self for practical purposes. At least, she might think that not the "whole" self is involved with freedom. Clarke's perspective also provides a natural segway into the disappearing agent problem, which comes from Derk Pereboom. Pereboom thinks that the event-causal free agent cannot select which of the indeterminate outcomes becomes the actual outcome of her deliberation over what to do, and that if her reason's reach an impasse, then her decision amounts to luck. To elaborate, Pereboom's problem with the

event-causal view is, at its core, well represented by Clarke's statement that human agents are not constituted by mental states and capacities. In other words, the DAP claims that event-causal free will sacrifices our feeling that we, as unified and real entities, are the cause of our actions, in order to explain which particular parts of us are relevant to decision making. Additionally, the DAP also raises the implied question: why don't we just posit the agent to be a substance, suggesting that decisions and actions be grounded by the agent but irreducible to physical causation? Ekstrom addresses this implied question earlier in the paper when she says

> Unlike agent-causal accounts,... [event-causal accounts] make no appeal to primitive substance causation. In accounting for free action, we need not appeal to agents as substances that somehow stand in a causal relation to events, in a way that is not reducible to event-causal terms. There are well-known problems in making sense of non-reducible agent-causation.

Responding to the DAP itself though, Esktrom says that the agent *does* exist, but that the agent's indeterministic reasons are what is relevant to the formation of a decision. Through her reasons, the agent exercises her will in making a decision. Simply put, in order for her reasons to belong to her, she must exist.

In my perspective, however, the problem is not fully settled. When Ekstrom says that "the agent *is* the source of his decisions and actions when they are free in an event-causal libertarian way", it contradicts her suggestion "that the agent is, functionally or psychologically speaking, his intellect and his will and his collection of character-defining attitudes. In terms of our practical agency, we ourselves are involved by way of thinking, aiming, desiring, valuing, preferring, believing, and deciding." Essentially, I think that when Ekstrom says that the agent is

the source of his action, she really means that particular parts of us, namely reasons, are the sources of our actions.

It seems as though the contemporary debate over free will can be reduced, in part, to a dispute over the metaphysical priority[10] of the components of self. More specifically, I think that in giving an account of free will, we indicate whether we believe that our self is an integrated whole, exhibiting genuine unity, or a mere aggregate, which is a random assemblage of parts. In other words, free will accounts make claims about *how[11]* we exist, under the assumption that we are indeed free. On one hand, agent-causal accounts claim that, if the agent is free, then the agent must be an independent substance that grounds each of its proper and interdependent parts, one of which is free will. On the other hand, Ekstrom's event-causal account claims that, if the agent is free, then the agent's freeness must be grounded by at least one of their proper parts, these free will grounding parts are called reasons.

Pertinately, as described here, Ekstrom's view does not cause the agent to disappear, but does imply that an agent is a mere aggregate of parts, rather than an integrated whole. In this respect, her view appears to align with the above mentioned view of Vaihinger and Nietzsche, who take a skeptical or illusionary stance. Strengthening the potency of the DAP against Ekstrom's view, I would assume, but am not sure, that Ekstrom does not mean to imply that the self is a real, but merely aggregate, entity that only exists in a functional manner.

Nevertheless, assuming that Ekstrom does not intend this implication, Vaihinger would argue that event-causal and agent-causal both take advantage of the summational fiction of self

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[10] Schaffer, Jonathan (2009). On what grounds what. In David Manley, David J. Chalmers & Ryan Wasserman (eds.), Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology. Oxford University Press. pp. 347-383.

[11] Jonathan Schaffer, in his paper "On What Grounds What", suggests that philosophy should adopt a conception of metaphysics that is less focused on the question of what really exists. Alternatively, Schaffer's purpose for metaphysics is to establish *how* something exists, or to create a hierarchical system of reality that has been ordered by priority in nature.

in creating their theory. For event-causal free will, Vaihinger would say that Ekstrom illegitimately reduces an infinitely complex system of interactions down to the few that she believes can be the sources of decisions. For agent-causal free will, Vaihinger would say that agent-causalists illegitimately reduce an infinitely complex system of interactions into one that can persist through time/space and is an uncaused substance. Lastly, he would argue that

> we should not permit ourselves to be misled or disturbed by the contradictions of the fiction with the world of experience or its inconsistency with itself, and that we should not infer so-called world-riddles from these contradictions. In other words, we must not become attached to these fictions as though they were the essential thing, but we must recognize them as fictions and be content with this knowledge, and refuse to allow ourselves to be enticed and confused by the illusory questions and illusory problems arising out of them. (82)

Attempting to show that an application of either agent-causal or event-causal free will involves difficult or controversial self-claims was in support of Vaihinger's argument above. Free will is a fiction. We can see this fact present even in Ekstrom's overarching claim, where she hesitates to hypothesize either indeterminate causation or the existence of free will having presupposed indeterminate causation. Vaihinger's point is that once we accept the fictional nature of, or at least refuse to hypothesize, free will, it is meaningless to make an attempt to cleanse such a fiction of its subsidiary or complimentary fictions/contradictions. Making such an attempt is like entering a maze wherein each turn we make creates a new maze.

5. Fictions in Morality

In this final section, I will discuss how free will, as a practical fiction, serves the purpose of regulating our own behavior and the behavior of our society as a whole. I will argue that free will regulates our behavior by being one of the components of moral responsibility. On the topic of fictional free will, Vaihinger references Hoppe's work in *Die Zurechnungsfähigkeit* when he says that

> Despite the impossibility of free will, we should nevertheless allow everyone the ideal wish which they embody, for every "false concept" has the value of an ideal… From this we may conclude that just as science, and especially mathematics, leads to the imaginary, so life leads us to the impossible, which is quite justifiable – to absolute responsibility, absolute freedom, and good actions for their own sake (absolute). Thou art a man and shouldst possess these noble sentiments – such is the command of the idealist and of society (39)

From this excerpt, Vaihinger claims that the self and society proceed, despite the lack of absolute freedom and/or responsibility in nature, analogously to how mathematics proceeds, despite the lack of ideal roundness or ideal points in nature. In other words, even though we might act *as if* we possess free will, the natural law still applies to us. In result, free will only has value if treated as an expedient fiction – a justified but fictional influence on our practical behavior.

In order to explain how free will influences our practical behavior, I will raise the same example that I did concerning how God influences our practical behavior. I said before that I sometimes feel an internal struggle between doing what is convenient or pleasurable, and doing what my conscience tells me is absolutely morally correct. In these situations, I have the tendency to consider the idea that despite the lack of affect, or perceptibility, that my actions may have, I will always be able to judge myself based upon whether I violated my own moral

intuitions. We see here that the application of God, as Vaihinger conceives him, explains our capacity for self judgment, or our conscience. The application of Vaihinger's free will, however, explains the existence of our internal struggle in the first place. Simply put, free will functions as our acknowledgment that actions should be *determined* by certain things and *free* from others. In this case, I acknowledge that my actions should be restricted by my conscience, and also free from certain immoral preferences. Therefore, by combining free will and God, we get the ability to judge and be judged. Accordingly, we should act *as if* moral duty was imposed by God, *as if* we would be judged as such, and *as if* we would be punished for immorality. Because we have the concept of God - a symbol of perfection - we understand that ideally there exists a perfect person and a perfect society. While the actualization of these concepts is impossible, they inspire practical tools such as laws and moral intuitions.

6 Defense of *The Philosophy of 'As If'*

Having given a substantial overview of Vaihinger's metaphysical and epistemological view, system of fictions, and examples of these fictions in contemporary philosophy, I will now develop some positive considerations of Vaihinger's view. Afterwards, I will address some objections, or concerns, that one might have with his view. Considering the positive benefits that come from adopting Vaihiger's view, foremost is the minimal ontological commitment. Sensations, his only ontologically existent entity, are pre-altered before we even get access to them. Furthermore, Vaihinger's system has applications in an incredibly wide range of scientific fields, and an even wider range of applications within those fields. Having been inspired by Darwin's theory of evolution, Vaihinger's evolutionary axiom appears quite plausible as well.

As for objections, I will include the claim that Vaihinger is a skepticist, the argument that he misrepresents the intentions of philosophers, objection to his axiom about the evolutionary function of the mind and fundamentality of sensations, and/or objection to his neo-Kantian metaphysical and epistemological view.

6.1 Skepticism vs. *The Philosophy of 'As If'*

Objectors to *The Philosophy of 'As If'* have occasionally applied the term *skepticism* to Vaihinger's system and views. I will now distinguish the important differences between skepticism and Vaihinger's work, claiming that he makes positive claims about principles, theories, and phenomena rather than appealing to their absence. Consequently, I will argue that *The Philosophy of 'As If'* can better be described by the term *relativism, or criticism*, which I will define and discuss.

From the very beginning of Vaihinger's system, he proposes the existence of the axiom that the mind's evolutionary purpose is survival, rather than objectivity. A skeptic might claim that objectivity does not exist, but this is simply not the purpose of Vaihinger's view. The purpose of The Philosophy of 'As If', alternatively, is to posit that consciously false conceptions and judgements are applied in all scientific and philosophical fields. Of course, because these consciously false ideas become contradictory when treated as hypotheses, the implication is that they don't "actually" exist. Even then, Vaihinger would say that for example, realist ethical philosophers, should simply consider their helpful logical contradictions to be fictions, just as scientists have done.

Vaihinger states that these helpful logical contradictions are simply due to the evolutionary nature of thought as it

conducts us automatically to certain illusory concepts just as in vision there are certain unavoidable optical errors. If we recognize this logical illusion as necessary, if we accept the fictions established thereby with a full realization of their significance and, at the same time, see through them (e.g. God, liberty, etc.) then we can cope with the logical resultant contradictions as necessary products of our thinking, by recognizing that they are the inevitable consequences of the inner mechanism of thought itself. No capital, then, can be made out of this for ordinary skepticism on the ground, for instance, that human thought is too weak for a knowledge of truth. (122)

The distinction between Vaihinger's view and skepticism can also be clarified by his claim that "we must be neither dogmatic nor skeptical, but *critical*." (147) In other words, although one may feel insignificant in the acknowledgment that our perception merely subjectively corresponds to reality, the conceptual world is still the world in which we live and feel. In virtue of thought's subjectivity, skepticism regards it as a "defective instrument which falsifies reality" (148-149). By contrast, Vaihinger holds that the subjective logical functions and their products are necessary and inevitable for practical life. Furthermore, by means of criticism we can discover the reasons for the existence of fictions, while also proving that in themselves, they do not constitute real knowledge but should be considered as a practical analogy.

In conclusion, relativism is a better term to describe *The Philosophy of 'As If'* than skepticism. While he denies that we have the capacity to hold knowledge about actual reality, Vaihinger states that the world in which we live and feel only exists in virtue of the subjective nature of thought. We shouldn't question the communicative and calculative purpose fulfilled by fictions because without logic, we would "remain silent and stare vacantly into space, after the manner of certain skeptics." (62 Vaihinger)

6.2 Misinterpreting Philosopher's and Philosophy

In *The Philosophy of 'As If'*, Vaihinger references Lange who says "religion must be maintained, but can only be maintained" by "being lifted into the realm of the ideal"; "religion together with metaphysics must be put on the same footing with art" (p. 494 Vol. II, pp. 484–503 [E.T., Vol. III, pp. 269–291 Lange) On one hand, given *The Philosophy of 'As If'*, I agree with Vaihinger and Lange that ontological questions about God and metaphysical concepts are useless if asked in the pursuit of objective knowledge. On the other hand, I disagree that theology and metaphysics need to be considered aesthetic fields. Instead, I will argue that "misinterpreting" philosophers might be necessary in order to understand the practical implications of their view, and to develop philosophy as a field of study rather than an aesthetic accessory to science.

During my treatment of contemporary ethical philosophy, I take part in the use of my own heuristic fiction by means of misinterpretation. Several times throughout *The Philosophy of 'As If'*, Vaihinger specifies that a helpful logical contradiction can only be considered as a fiction if used knowingly. While this is plausibly the case for accounts of free will, wherein the philosopher hesitates to posit the existence of free will definitively, it is clearly not the case in certain theological accounts of God. For the purposes of establishing the present logical contradictions, I sometimes intentionally misinterpret them, acting *as if* the account of God uses fictions knowingly by describing certain components of their view as fictional. What I really mean when I say that certain components of a view are fictional, is that the account *should* consider whatever logical device to be a fiction, in order to save their view from logical contradiction.

Similarly to the way in which I "misinterpret" philosophical accounts, so does Jonathan Schaffer[12], who is a proponent of grounding. He argues "that the Quinean method requires presuppositions about ordering structure at every single stage." (366 Schaffer 2009) During the course of his argument, Schaffer reduces Quinean debates into debates about fundamentality. Despite "misinterpreting" the original intent of philosophers on each side of the debates in question, this allows him to bring many philosophical debates under a more interesting and helpful rubric, or purpose. Analogously, misinterpreting the authors of the accounts within sections **3-5,** allows me to group a variety of logical contradictions under the rubric of "fiction". While Schaffer and Vaihinger might completely disagree about the correct rubric to use, and its epistemological consequences, philosophy as a field should take their lead. Unless philosophical research can discard existence questions in favor of practical, or functional, questions, as science has, philosophy will become a purely aesthetic pursuit.

6.3 Evolutionary Axiom and Fundamentality of Sensations

Vaihinger offers a kind of evolutionary account of human reasoning, positing that ideas are not direct representations of the world, but are always mediated by other ideas and, fundamentally, their function in our striving to persevere. An objector to this proposal might ask, however, how Vaihinger can propose an axiom of his own, while simultaneously denying our capacity for real knowledge. In response, I point out that self-critically, Vaihinger leaves the door open for some assumptions, or axioms, that he holds to eventually sink to the level of hypotheses and by extension, fictions. He explains that such

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[12] Jonathan Schaffer, in his paper "On What Grounds What", suggests that philosophy should adopt a conception of metaphysics that is less focused on the question of what really exists. Alternatively, Schaffer's purpose for metaphysics is to establish *how* something exists, or to create a hierarchical system of reality that has been ordered by priority in nature.

gradual degradation has, in fact, frequently occurred. Even in mathematics or mathematical physics these pillars are now being shaken, and it is not at all unlikely that elements may here be shown to be fictional that have hitherto been regarded as axiomatic. (37-38)

In the face of more tenable axioms, Vaihinger would not shy away from considering his own system to be a heuristic artificial classification itself; maintained simply for the purpose of ordering logical contradictions and their practical uses. Teleology represents one previously held axiom that still provides heuristic and classificatory value today. The only real problem for Vaihinger arises if a verifiably more tenable axiom entails that human perception is, in fact, perfectly objective. However, Vaihinger's work, and common sense, indicate that this is extremely unlikely to happen.

Another related objection could be raised towards Vaihinger's characterization of sensory data as the only real thing, and as fundamental to our conceptual world. For Vaihinger, the term "sensory data" is a fiction. In other words, the word is a meaningless shell used to describe its content. For Vaihinger, even as we first perceive our senses in their most elementary form, they have been subjectively processed for the sake of our comprehension. The term "Sensory Data" just refers to whatever our senses are before being processed, which is unknowable. Essentially, when Vaihinger says that sensory data is the only real thing, he means that the real things that we are "given" are the only real things that we are "given".

Characterizing sensation as fundamental to our conceptual world, however, is potentially more difficult to defend. Vaihinger claims that ideas work as an intermediary bridge between sensations and action, but what exactly does it mean for a human being to take action? Can we really reduce action to sequences and coexistences of sensory data? To this question, Vaihinger

references Horwicz' book *Psychologische Analysen auf physiologischer Grundlage*, where Horwicz shows that all psychology is based on a scheme of reflexes:

> Sense-impressions following upon stimulation, ideas leading up to thought, expressive movement and volitional action. The simplest reflexes are motor phenomena following upon stimulation. These stimuli must result in elementary feelings, which release corresponding movements, representing the most elementary beginning of volitional actions. In the interval between these impressions on the one hand and the motor expression on the other hand ideas come to the surface, first in an elementary form, but growing more and more complicated, so that in their highest form they may be described as Thought-processes. (xxviii Vaihinger)

Horwicz' view itself, however, can be considered an abstractive neglective fiction, in that he ignores the causal factors in favor of a description of the sequence of events. If "true", however, the system does establish sensory data's fundamentality to action, stimuli being synonymous with sensory data in this reference. Ultimately though, like most aspects of Vaihinger's system, the fundamentality of "sensory data", the term itself being a meaningless shell, simply serves as an artificial classification, or ordering, of the world in the event that it becomes untenable. Furthermore, unless our view of perception changes radically, the term "sensory data" will easily conform to the next conception of its contents.

6.4 Neo-Kantian Metaphysics and Epistemology

Influenced by Schopenhauer's struggle for existence and Darwin's theory of evolution, Vaihinger believes that "originally thought is only used by the will as a means to its own ends,

and that only in the course of evolution does thought free itself from the bonds of the will and become an end in itself."[13](xxvii) Linking up with Kant's limiting theory, this evolutionary capacity for the highly developed mind to break free of its purpose can explain thought's confrontation with impossible problems, such as the meaning of the universe, that represent thinking for the sake of thinking. In other words, Vaihinger's form of neo-Kantianism asserts that it is not merely a limit on the capacity of human beings, but a limit within the nature of thought itself, that denies us objectivity. Rejecting Kant's notion that we could theoretically know our experience (if we were not limited by being human), he argues that the logical conclusion of Kant's philosophy results with everything, including causality, being a mental construct.

An objector to Vaihinger's form of neo-Kantian metaphysical and epistemological view might appreciate Vaihinger's extensive classification of logical contradictions and their practical uses, while also being unwilling to commit to such an apparently radical metaphysics. The idea that we never experience phenomena, or that our senses are pre-distantanced from true reality, seem extremely unreasonable at first glance. Fortunately, Vaihinger is not necessarily wedded to some unreasonable metaphysics, because he regards all the ways we talk about the world, even his own way of talking, as employing fictions. When Vaihinger says something like: the perceptual world is the symbol by means of which we orient ourselves, science, and philosophy; but it will never be anything more. He is not saying that the world we experience is literally a symbol, as if part of a mathematical equation. In actuality, this is just his way of expressing that our capacity for perception serves the purpose of helping us to survive and doesn't require perfect objectivity, which doesn't seem as controversial.

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[13]*The Philosophy of 'As If'* (xxvii Vaihinger)

7. Conclusion

At the heart of Vaihinger's system is an attempt to expose and eliminate the notion that, because a concept is logically contradictory, it is for that reason of no value. He claims that the contrary is true, that these contradictory concepts are the most valuable. To this end, Vaihinger attempts to classify the sequences and configurations of practical fictions to great degree of breadth and depth. The resulting exposure of logical processes' scaffolding or skeleton, underlies and supports every scientific and philosophical field of study. In the scope and variety of classification, emphasis of case-by-case analysis, and flexible combination of linguistic, ontological, hermeneutic and revolutionary attributes, Vaihinger's fictionalism even surpasses contemporary fictionalism.

In conclusion, for the pursuit of philosophical answers, rather than looking forwards, constructing an ever growing tower of contradictions; one should look backwards, to show how these questions arose psychologically within us. Despite Vaihinger's claim that philosophy may eventually amount to an aesthetic field, I believe that the study of science's underlying skeleton, or the *how* of existence, should be the field's next evolution. Essentially, if the will refers to the evolutionary function of our mind, I agree with Nietzsche who says "The highest indication of will is the belief in the illusion (although we see through it)" (vol. IX 109).

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