



By Their Fruits Ye Shall Not Know Them: Forgery, Collective Intentionality and Aesthetics

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If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.

Mark Twain

1. Outline

By applying evolutionary aesthetic models to the case of New Testament forgery (or any forgery for that matter) it will be possible to reestablish the notion of the author and authorial intention in works of art. This stands in contrast to much current thinking in literary criticism which repudiates both the author as a causal factor and denies the very existence of human nature, as current Theory alludes primarily to 'forces' or 'texts' that take place in language only. Softening this view by seeing human endeavor as a tendency rather than a deterministic chain will be crucial for this article. By combining Dutton's criteria of art with the examples of proximate and distal causes we can see that forgeries, no different than artistic works, are products of cultural and natural forces, both social and individual, without alienating these two relational pressures from one another. Forgers, for example, seek to gain the status of the author they claim to be, and this, as will be shown, has as much to do with evolutionary processes as it does the cultural milieu in which the forgery takes place. Recategorizing these distinctions will prove useful for future discussion and consilient integration of elements of cultural and evolutionary theories. I will draw from Searle's account of observer-dependent/independent features, collective intentionality and his account of brute and institutional facts. Dutton's recalibration of the definition of art, through Searle, can then be framed with Wilson's view of group level selection.

2. Forgery's Three Criteria

When Auguste Rodin was working on his early masterpiece, *The Age of Bronze*, the figure was so lifelike that soon accusations began circling that the sculptor had simply cast the model in plaster rather than diligently sculpting it by hand. Of course these charges were denied (a little scandal never being a bad thing for an artist) and Rodin later went on to become one of the pioneers of modern sculpture. What is interesting is that this potential deceit, using *surmoulage* (casting directly from a live model rather than sculpting) on Rodin's part, would cause such an uproar because the statue was too lifelike. The offense cited here was a result of the sculpture being too 'accurate', as if verisimilitude in sculpture at the time were a quality to be avoided. Irony notwithstanding, in this case, we see a core principle of human endeavor that extends

past the aesthetic into the ethical, philosophical and natural: We do not like cheaters, liars, betrayers or fakes.¹ Had Rodin merely used a plaster cast of a live model, we would not value his work as highly as we do. It would be fraudulent to call it a sculpture because no skill would have gone into it. Boundaries in the definition of art always expand from previous models, theories and ideologies because art is iterative. While this article on forgery has as much to do with law, morality and ethics, for the sake of space I will confine my outline here to aesthetic and artistic practice for the sake of space.

Forgery, like intentional deceit, is nearly universally looked down upon.² Several things become clear after agreeing that lying or deception (or related behavior) in nearly every society in recorded history tends to be looked down upon or results in punitive social and personal reaction. What becomes clear is that, first, human beings read each others' intentions when dealing with artistic production and objects, and hence all aesthetic theories that deny either a distinct (but variable) human nature or deny an artist's intention in a work of art (as does reader-response theory variations) should be rejected. To ignore intention in human action is simply not how our social and cultural institutions operate, and this is emphasized by John Searle in his distinction of propositional content and conditions of satisfaction. A promise or betrayal, as in a forgery, would not satisfy the conditions of satisfaction since they would violate the intentional stance of the forged author. Content violates intent precisely because the intention in a forgery is exactly content violation. Searle says, "It is a general feature of intentional states with a propositional content that they have conditions of satisfaction. Indeed, if one wanted a slogan for analyzing intentionality, I believe it should be this: 'By their conditions of satisfaction shall ye know them'" (*Mind, Language, and Society* 1998, 104).³ If intention were not important, if everything is texts reading texts, then forgery itself should matter not a whit, or plagiarism, for that matter. Forgery's intent violates satisfaction criteria.

Second, at least some aesthetic valuation results from evolutionary processes because as an ultra-social species, we constantly 'read' each others' intentional actions and stances. Were we a species for which there was no ability to read in others' actions and words things like deception or fraud, then ours would have been a species not long for this Earth, at least in our present form. Of course individuals may act out of sole self-interest, lying or cheating or hurting others, but every culture has ways of moderating this to maintain social cohesion. If we didn't, most likely our species would have gone extinct. As such, a leftover of this early modulation is an extreme interest in agonistic structures and tensions in literature which reflects both our

¹ In Daniel Everett's, *Language: The Cultural Tool*, he holds up the tribe depicted in the book, the Paraha, as evidence to counter much evolutionary thinking that there exist certain human universals. In the book, Everett leans toward social or linguistic constructivism, seeing language as a human invention with no genetic link. The tribe in the book, the Paraha, it seems, have next to no cultural products, live a subsistence lifestyle, have no rituals of marriage or burial, and so on, have an extremely limited vocabulary. Yet, according to the theory of evolution, what we will see among the many cultural aspects and output is a variation. That there is a culture out there, isolated from nearly all outside contact, that seems to defy predictions that hold up remarkably well in nearly all other regards to nearly all other cultures, does not disprove anything. Such cultures would simply reflect variations on a broad tendency of the human species to produce complex symbolic language, cultural practices that reflect genotypic traits in relation to particular environments in which they occur, and to maintain and enjoy artistic practice. That the Paraha do not, does not undo my aims in this paper. For a response to Everett, see McWhorter.

² Here, one might point to Odysseus' deceptions to repudiate this claim. Odysseus' lies are a matter of high-skill displays in the context of his heroic stature, especially with the dramatic irony firmly in place that the reader/listener knows the context in which he is lying. Deception with the intention of harming someone only for the benefit of the deceiver tends to be seen as negative.

³ The similarity here to my title is a delightful coincidence that came up upon re-reading Searle, the both taking the phrase from Matthew 7:16.

egalitarian tendencies and helps communities regulate dominance impulse.⁴ Looking at agonistic patterns in literature, Joseph Carroll notes, "It seems likely, then, that agonistic structure in fictional narratives emerged in tandem with specifically human adaptations for cooperation and specifically human adaptations for creating imaginative constructs that embody the ethos of the tribe" (2011, 173-174). Our species has been around much longer and in much smaller groups than the later agricultural revolution allowed. This was precisely the same reason why there could have been no jail system in early agrarian culture: there simply wasn't enough food to go around. Most stories do center on agonistic structures, though, and since most life involves these structures, it should be no surprise to see that they're ubiquitous across storytelling cultures. Regarding dominance as a negatively coded agonistic structure, Carroll says, "If suppressing dominance in hunter-gatherers fulfills an adaptive social function, and if agonistic structure in the novels engages the same social dispositions that animate hunter-gatherers, our study would lend support to the hypothesis that literature fulfills an adaptive social function" (2011, 152). This can only be true if humans read intentions in stories as we do in each other. Aesthetic valuation here is proximately related to a kind of storytelling tradition at the cultural level and the distally related group selection unit that we respond to in stories of agonistic relation and dominance between 'good characters' and the 'bad'. Forgery violates our egalitarian tendencies.

Third, in the case of forgeries it is exactly authorial intention, skill display and status (here I mean in a text) that the forger intends to usurp as his or her own, thus mimicking the ethos or fame or valor or desirable qualities of a particular individual. Were there no core human nature to appeal to, or were there only endlessly deferred meanings, or discursive powers running the show, as many proponents of Theory claim (and here, I am sweeping all postmodern, post-structuralist, post-human, post-post-theory, etc., into the same bag)⁵, it would make exactly no difference if this text or that painting or whatever we happened to be reading or looking at were merely a forgery.⁶ However, this is obviously not true. Though a 'culture only' theory can describe the localized cultural rationale (proximate causes) behind something like forgery, it lacks a comprehensive platform required for a deeper understanding of the human self and resulting creations (distal causes). If we take language away, we are still left with evolutionary forces at work. Searle makes the distinction between observer-dependent and observer-independent facts (*Freedom and Neurobiology* 2007, 82). The basic distinction is that to be observer-dependent, the target or feature being described will invariably be impossible to

⁴ Again, I don't mean this in a Utopian manner. Hierarchies are going to spring up any time one person or group manages to both take hold of resources and then justify it. The divine right of kings and pharos, priest classes and any other such action requires threat of violence and/or state/divine/legal rectification. Also, human beings pushed to extreme poverty or hunger may well become aggressively non-egalitarian. I do not want to suggest that the egalitarian modes of life only exist so long as things are in relative peace and prosperity, but that the human ability to band together confers a strong advantage for survival. The tension between selection at the individual level and the group level quite readily explains a whole range of human behavior.

⁵ This particular phrasing comes out of necessity. Far too much category shaving has subdivided the general thrust of postmodern and poststructuralist thought. I see any 'theory' that denies human nature, denies evolutionary influences on our species or puts absolute emphasis on acculturation through language only as being more or less the same.

⁶ I am quite aware that a lot of 20th century art has been preoccupied with the notion of the author, the text and meaning in an age of mechanical and digital reproduction. However, for as interesting as some of these ideas are, they are variations and tangents from the evolved principles I outline in this article. Reactions of this sort, rejections of meaning and value, require something to react to and reject. This principle of variation, highly lauded today as a concomitant of 'diversity' is ideologically opposed to the very principles it would seem to uphold. Claiming that a bonobo or computer or a wave crashing on a beach can write a beautiful poem or create a beautiful painting, it might make for an interesting theoretical paper, but try to get 99% of people to take it seriously and it will nothing but an uphill battle.

describe or define without language or social proscription. Marriage or literature or money are observer-dependent while the properties of physics or chemistry are not. Add to that list the functions of evolution and it should be clear that in the case of forgery, it functions at both levels. The intention of the forger is observer-dependent while the offense taken at forgery (or any deception) is both observer-dependent (acculturated) and observer-independent (in that our intense prosocial nature will tend to decry this behavior). Elsewhere Searle says that “there are words, symbols, or other conventional devices that mean something or express something or represent or symbolize something beyond themselves, in a way that is publicly understandable” (*Construction of Social Reality* 1995, 60-61). Searle makes clear that language is a convention about the world, but the world or reality as it is, requires no special set of meanings as it exists. The world is there. It is a language-independent fact until we start to talk about it. Evolutionary forces are there, even in the human species, and in the case of forgery, because it takes place in language (or symbolic interaction) and because it is a violation of our group-level evolved sense of equity (as we saw with Carroll above), it operates between the dependent/independent divide. Hence it helps to see culturally and historically contingent views of aesthetic objects as proximate causes, that is, these are the localizable influences that each artist would find themselves working in, through or under. Evolutionary or sociobiological thinking helps to bring back the possibility of establishing links between cultures rather than differences and difference only. Since these evolutionary underpinnings would sit beneath the cultural (or on, or with, or insert the preposition you like) in a constant interplay in society and in the individual, it is useful to link these underpinnings through the ultimate or distal cause relationship artistic practice linked in some cases, as with forgery, between the dependent/independent divide.

3. Dutton’s Cluster Criteria and Forgery

First, forgery can be seen as a feigned high-skill display (Dutton 2009, 191). Just as a professional athlete caught using steroids would be fined and suspended, so too would an author face public condemnation and persecution for passing a forgery along either in their own name or using the name of another, more established author. The skill involved in, the human labor involved in, the creation of a work of art follows along with Denis Dutton’s 12 cluster criteria (discussed later), and human beings, given our understanding of limited time resources (*viz.* short lives), are keen to appreciate time-intensive projects and products. The second evolutionary function that forgery manipulates is that of status. As a hierarchical primate, humans are incredibly sensitive to status, and even in hunter-gatherer societies famous for their renunciation of status distinctions, it is precisely because they understand the power and potential disruptive qualities of status that they work toward egalitarian modes of living (Boyd 2009, 109). At the time of Pauline forgeries, powerful changes in this social continuum would require incredible skill displays and appeals to status, hence the pseudonymous Pauline epistles’ use of Paul’s name. Such upheaval of existing social pattern obviously operates at both the cultural and natural levels at the proximate and distal levels, and attempting to see this without appeal to both sides of the human self (though I am loathe to call them sides as if they are opposites) is misguided. The proximate cause of the Pauline forgery here is the intention to convert or retain believers into the Christian ideology and to scare everyone away from normal modes of living in order to enhance the doctrine of salvation through Jesus with the impending apocalypse close at hand.⁷ Ultimate causes of forgery are broad necessarily, but these include human susceptibility to status influences. For evidence of this, look outside, up or down, on the TV or internet where celebrities hawk products and beautiful bodies are garbed in the latest

⁷ For a far richer account of Paul’s arguments and debates at the time, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (2003, 95-112).

fashion. Were there no influence through status, advertising would have quickly (and long ago) found a new way to sell the new same-old. Instances of forgery always involve interaction between these proximate and distal causes in a way that, for example, defining what a forgery is doesn't.

Dutton's book, *The Art Instinct*, outlines a theory by which we can define artistic practice as a kind of skill display, similar to an athletic event. He notes, "1. Human interest in high-skill activities –particularly those with a public face, such as athletic or artistic performances- derives at least in part from their ancient status as Darwinian fitness signals. 2. High-skill performances are normally subjects of freely given admiration; in fact, achieving the pleasure of admiration is a reason audiences will pay to see high-skill exhibitions. 3. As signals, high-skill performances are subject to keen critical assessment and evaluation –the fastest or highest in athletics, the clearest, most eloquent or deepest, or most moving in the case of the arts" (2009, 191-192). Seen as a kind of high-skill exhibition, Paul's letters and the forgeries in his name are attempts of conversion and subversion of normal civic practice at the time. That is exactly what Paul intended to do, and the forger of Paul intends to piggy-back the proselytizer. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Paul's epistles, echoing Jesus, would undo the normal order of family, procreation, civic life and nearly every form of recreation to prepare for the imminent apocalypse which Paul assumed was nigh. Put simply, Paul was working, as was Jesus, under the assumption that the end was coming soon. That would be a hard sell unless one appeals to ultimate authority as a form of extreme skill display.

Speaking of the Christian Apocryphal Acts (reflecting the same views as Paul), Bart Ehrman says, " These texts were meant to be disruptive of traditional society; they were designed to tear apart the fabric of communal existence and split up the home ... To be sure, these texts focused on community, family, and sex. But it was precisely in order to disrupt the values of everyday life and its enjoyments"(*Lost Christianities* 2003, 44). This conversion and subversion would have required an inordinate level of skill exhibition in order to convince people to renounce the few pleasures available to them made all the more effective by utilizing Paul's name and stature. As Ehrman notes (2003, 46), Paul's incessant renunciation of the body and sex (inverting natural order) had a side effect commonly overlooked by later commentators and misogynists like Tertullian, namely, that since the apocalypse would destroy the current system and because as Paul says, "in Christ 'there is not male and female'" (2003, 46). This for Paul meant that the hierarchical and traditional divide between men and women would come down. Paul traditionally had women leaders among his churches and it was only the later ascension of patriarchal leaders like Tertullian, who kept Pauline asceticism while rejecting women's possible role in church proceedings, that we get much of our current Christianity today. Here again, to echo Searle, forged content violates intent, replacing that with the forger's own intended message. To maintain the hierarchical male-dominated priest caste required this forgery in the name of Paul to blunt some of the apocalyptic message while instituting new rules of social regulation.

In addition to intention, a second question to ask is where would a forgery fall along a set of criteria that takes both the cultural and natural seriously. Though Paul's letters aren't clearly literary works, stretching the boundaries of application and methodology may prove useful for future endeavor in the combination of cultural and natural approaches to literary and textual analysis. Dutton gives a list of 12 categories as criteria for what constitutes a work of art. What is notable is that his list is not exclusionary toward Theory. His list is 1. direct pleasure (from the artistic object), 2. skill and virtuosity (time and skill to create), 3. style (form giving rise to novelty), 4. novelty and creativity (exploration of theme and/or media), 5. criticism (critical judgment and appreciation), 6. representation (imitation of real/imaginary things), 7. special focus (separates the work from quotidian life), 8. expressive individuality (expression of artist's self), 9. emotional saturation, 10. intellectual challenge , 11. art traditions and institutions (place

in context of culture), & 12. imaginative experience (2009, 196-200). For Dutton, to qualify as a work of art, the text or object must satisfy each of these criteria to varying degree. Right away, it should be clear that no forgery can satisfy these categories. Interestingly, Dutton's chapter deals with these through examination of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, a work of art Duchamp himself declared to not be art. Duchamp says, "The word 'readymade' thrust itself on me then. It seemed perfect for these things that weren't works of art, that weren't sketches, and to which no art terms applied. That's why I was tempted to make them" (qtd in Dutton 2009, 201). Duchamp's intention was clearly to create a non-art object as a matter of asking an interesting question to which there isn't a clear answer through proximate cultural causes. However, turning Dutton's criteria back to forgeries and looking at proximate and distal causes we find a more rich and varied tapestry.

A forgery, any forgery, will satisfy all of these categories except for #8. The individual expressing their thoughts is not actually the named individual, hence it violates intention. Though it may be a high-skill performance, it is exactly because of its falsity that it violates or diminishes the text and its meaning. Take for example the famed six word short story attributed to Ernest Hemingway, "For sale: Baby shoes. Never worn". A 2012 article by Frederick Wright shows that this story was most likely not written by Papa Hemingway, but had been circulating for some time around newspapers in various forms. Wright makes clear that the story was almost certainly not originally written by Hemingway. What effect does this have? Again, it violates #8 and removes much of #11 since we can no longer relate the story to Hemingway's other works, robbing this unique six word story of its association with Hemingway's status. Hence, we can no longer connect the story to his other high-skill performances. Proximate and ultimate causes here center on very nearly the same thing: conferring status on the author (distal cause relating to high skill performance based on evolutionary factors of recognition) for having done so much with so little (proximate cause relating to the particular story itself as it mimics a newspaper advert). As it is, the story is still riveting and poignant, just a bit more deflated for its unmooring from Hemingway's name. Pauline forgery (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, Galatians and Philippians are uncontested, while Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and Ephesians are broadly considered forgeries) has a far wider and far darker shadow because the intent to deceive, to mimic the high-skill display and status-theft, clearly was the intentional state of the forger. As a historical fact for the secular scholar, this is not as critical an issue, but for the believer and especially for the way in which Paul's letters have shaped thought in the Western world and literary tradition, such intentional deception has had a deleterious effect on cultural and legal strictures.⁸

4. Searle: Collective Intentionality, Status Function & Brute and Institutional Facts

John Searle outlines a way of understanding institutions in human society that he labels 'collective intentionality'. He says, "The capacity for social cooperation is a biologically based capacity shared by humans and many other species . It is the capacity for collective intentionality, and collective intentionality is just the phenomenon of is just the phenomenon of shared forms of intentionality in in human or animal cooperation" (Freedom and Neurobiology 2007, 82). This notion for Searle is clearly biologically based and squares with Dutton's earlier contribution about the definition of art. This kind of cooperative ability allows for individuals to collectively find meaning in brute facts (This rock is heavy and weighs 45 kilos) and in institutional facts (Paying money to your gym for the privilege of lifting heavy rocks there is a good thing) (2007, 87). "When we consider human capacities specifically we discover a truly remarkable phenomenon. Human beings have the capacity to impose functions on objects,

⁸ Of course, Nietzsche called Paul a bad reader.

which, unlike sticks, levers, boxes and salt water, cannot perform the function solely in virtue of their physical structure, but only in virtue of a certain form of a certain form of the collective acceptance of the objects as having a certain sort of status" (2007, 87). Collective intentionality grants a system to confer on it a status function which underlies these institutional facts (2007, 87). Religion's status function (rules set down by the gods) underlies its institutional facts (particular doctrines) based on the collective intentionality of the brute fact of human being's capability to have collective intentionality at all. Religion confers this status function on itself based on human prosociality. Forgery follows this same pattern. The forger's status function (Forgery X is important because it was written by author Y) underlies its institutional facts (that author Y has a capacity for valuable high-skill displays and therefore has value) based on the collective intentionality of our species' appreciation for these displays which is an evolutionary trait. Returning to Dutton's 12 criteria, the forger's violation of #8 (expressive individuality & expression of artist's self) violates the collective intentionality of the institutional fact that it is trying to mimic. This has everything to do with intention on the part of the individual (or group) attempting to steal author Y's status (high-skill display capability) and author Y's status function (valuable author because of status).⁹ Here, the proximate cause relates to institutional facts (being somewhat culturally determined) while the ultimate cause relates to brute facts (humans show evolutionarily patterned behavior).

Contrast this idea with the question of authorship in general. For example, in Homer, we generally speak of an author, Homer who was by tradition a blind bard. If the two works attributed to him are in fact collective oral works, themselves the products of hundreds of years of revision and aggregation, it still doesn't matter who the author really was except for scholarly desiderata. Clearly, the works have much more skill display and their institutional facts will be more highly regarded if there really was a single author whose genius created and held those works together, but there is no breaking of collective intentionality because there would be no intention to feign the skill display if it's one person or many who wrote the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. There is no violation of intentional stances.¹⁰ I would say that this also applies to *1001 Nights*, where the book is clearly the work of many individuals, and the question of authorship is an interesting but decidedly scholarly one. In Dutton's schema, we have no violation of expressive individuality (criterion #8) since the intentional stance here is not one of deception but rather of authorial aggregation. Slicing backwards into the problem by saying that authorship 'at that time' was not as important is a bland excuse. Of course authorship was important. It was certainly different than it is now, but that's a cultural practice (proximate), not an essential difference (distal). It meant something even to the cave artists who left silhouettes of their hands all through the caverns of Chauvet and Lascaux, as if to say that so and so was here, so and so did this. Sophocles' victories in the yearly drama contests of Athens was clearly something important to him. A recording artist today whose song might be sampled in someone else's song requires attribution. That today it revolves around copyright and more aggressively capitalistic expression is a continuity and not some kind of paradigm shift into a wholly different ontological mode of authorial self-understanding. The institutional fact here

⁹ Status in the evolutionary definition and status function according to Searle are similar but different categories.

¹⁰ Of course there is some cultural stance taken in Homer that is meant to codify action and conduct, such as *xenia* or right conduct of the warrior in an honor culture. The main difference here is that while Homer invokes the muses for assistance, the poem is not meant to be a revealed text of the word of God in the way that the Judeo-Christian text is. All texts will necessarily reflect much of the culture's collective intentionality. This should not be surprising in the least, but it is why cultural theory remains important as a field of study that should work to integrate history, science and culture into its methods. This is why there is no violation of Dutton's #8. Homer intends to convey Homer's message. Paul meant to convey Jesus' and God's. The Pauline forger meant to mimic Paul. The last two clearly are violations of collective intention.

remains that works of art and high skill display are valued from culture to culture (proximate) based on our evolved capacity to grant these value (distal). Forgery is a violation of collective intentionality and because that violates intention, it is something we naturally disavow.

To see this more clearly, we must turn back to Searle and collective intentionality. He outlines three general characteristics of collective intentionality. These are, first, the status function applied to something cannot be constituted by its physical characteristics only. Second, the form takes the shape of 'X counts as Y in C'. Third, the process of collective intentionality no need even be conscious in the minds of all participants (*The Construction of Social Reality* 1995, 46-47). The second criterion here is most clearly related to forgery. X is the forged work, Y is the status and high skill display potential of a different individual (or group) and C is the cultural context in which these appraisals are made. The Pauline forgeries (X) clearly intended to utilize Paul's standing (Y) in order to refashion his thoughts to influence the society and beliefs of the people being addressed (C). Again, Dutton's criterion # 8 is violated as the proximate cause (influencing by feigning Paul's high skill display) is intended to manipulate the distal (humans evolved appreciation). Michael Wreen says, "Forgery, then, is intrinsically aesthetically wrong because aesthetic experience should take into account the what-it-is of its object, and forgery, by its very nature, frustrates this aim by presenting us with an object purporting to have an essence which it does not in fact have" (1983, 219). Searle's notions of collective intentionality and 'status function' offer a very clear distinction why the forged work of art is aesthetically wrong. The status function of a forgery is intentional deceit, thus its collective intentionality when shown to be a forgery is radically altered. Dutton gives a clear set of criteria how art operates between the individual as evolved and cultural unit and between the community as collective evolved and cultural unit since any forgery is a clear violation of category #8.

5. Group Level Selection and Religious Forgery

It should be clear that pretty much anyone claiming to know the word of the gods has a pretty strong claim to back up but also immense potential influence because if they are able to convince enough people that they are the gods' antenna, then the benefits outweigh the costs. The collective intentionality of a particular religion's beliefs has to be earned. Hence, the appeal to miracles, visions, private states, limited eyewitness accounts, incredible feats and the like. Strictly hierarchical religions also violate the basic human nature toward altruism and empathy. Richard Alexander says, "Gods are inventions originally developed to extend the notion that some have greater rights than others to design and enforce rules, and that some are destined to be leaders, others to be followers" (1987, 207). Most hunter-gatherer cultures tend to be egalitarian. "First, some empirical facts. Anthropologists don't agree on much, but they appear to agree that modern hunter-gatherer societies around the world are remarkably egalitarian ... Hunter-gatherer egalitarianism extends beyond food to social relationships ... [and] Hunter-gatherers are egalitarian not because they lack selfish impulses but because selfish impulses are effectively controlled by other members of the group" (Wilson 2002, 21). This isn't some 'noble savage' idea of these cultures as living Edenic and selfless lives. Of course they have individual impulse. But the prosocial advantage of communal activity and egalitarian behavior gives a better survival chance. Seeing groups as units of selection rather than just individuals allows us to understand the existence of large communities, altruism, morality and cultural practices like art and law. As Alexander notes, it requires a substantial thesis to have people give up egalitarian modes of life and switch to a rigidly hierarchical one. The collective intentionality of egalitarian life would have to give way only through a very influential person or group. Of course this can be done by force or violence, but in the case of the Pauline forgeries (that aren't consistent with Paul's actual letters), it is the appeal to his status and potential skill displays that

the author/authors manipulated to create a proximate cause (shifting belief systems) based on the forger's personal collective intentionality.

This is most likely why forgery or fraud is so widely panned. It asserts the individual over the group. Forgery swaps the brute fact (not authored by X) for the institutional fact (Author X is really great) in order to assert and change an already invalid collective intentionality. If religion is an adaptive unit, as Wilson claims, then its collective intentionality may be said to act as a kind of meta-forgery to swap out egalitarian modes of life for ones that favor the smaller group 'forging' the gods' names, intentions and desires. This argument is, to me, most likely and most likely unprovable. What remains, though, is clear. Forgery is a fake skill display that manipulates the evolved tendency in humans to appreciate and value individuals capable of high-skill display. The proximate causes of forgery are variable (money, power, religious upheaval), but these center on distal causes that remain more or less invariable (humans are prosocial and their collective intentionality can be manipulated by the swapping of brute facts for institutional ones). The thing that gave us our social cohesion is the thing that forgers and liars and frauds manipulate in order to gain advantage. That this behavior is, more often than not, punished in some way should speak to an invariable tendency in our species toward egalitarian behavior toward one another. A bad apple doesn't spoil the bunch so much as every bunch is bound to have some bad apples, and those groups best suited to rooting out the rotten are the groups that have the best group level selection advantage.

6. Theory, Let's Be Friends

What would the good Theorist say to all of this? Asked a question about forgery, would they hold up a work of Baudrillard's and cry out, 'Simulacrum!?' The ubiquity and continued influence of Theory in aesthetics and literary representation must finally give way to a broader and more comprehensive view of our species. Many Theory proponents would deny outright that there is a 'human nature', relegating this idea away by heavy focus on language and variability in human cultures. There is strange perspective here, to me. On one hand, few of these theorists would deny evolution by natural and sexual selection, and yet in the same breath they will deny that it has any influence on human beings, our species still clearly a byproduct of billions of years of evolution. Somehow, they would have it, we are magically (and magic it would have to be) immune to the pressures and forces that have ateleologically wrought and shaped every living thing on the planet. That by wielding language (itself an evolved behavior with its origins in the evolved human brain) we can influence ourselves and one another (evolved trait and behavior) and thereby escape evolution's yoke, unlike anything else in all of the natural world. I am at odds to begin to understand how this would even be possible, how our species alone cannot be influenced in some (and, to be clear, not all) of our cultural and personal practices by the forces of natural and sexual selection. Yet, many of these same theorists will call upon 'forces' that influence human activity as readily as they will obscure their point in their prose. The forces of class, of relations, of power are evoked as broad metaphors which can apply here and there, in political and personal situations interchangeably and often without any particular rhyme or reason. For example, Gilles Deleuze attempts an explanation of Michel Foucault's definition of power, saying:

What is power? Foucault's definition seems a very simple one: power is a relation between forces, or rather every relation between forces is a 'power relation'. In the first place we must understand that power is not a form, such as the State-form; and that the power relation does not lie between two forms, as does knowledge. In the second place, force is never singular but essentially exists in relation with other forces, such that any force is already a relation, that is to say power: force has no other object or subject than force. This does not create a return to natural law, because for its part law is a form of expression, whereas Nature is a form of

visibility and violence a concomitance or consequence of force, but not a constituent element. (Foucault 1988, 59)

As I take it, Deleuze interprets Foucault as saying that power is itself, but also relational, not necessarily natural (or expressed/expressible there), neither bound by nor expressing natural law, but is found everywhere and thus would seem to have some natural origin, otherwise where would this 'force' come from since it is 'not a form' which, I assume, makes it also a cultural practice. In a word, what Deleuze explains is nothing.¹¹ To say that an abstract force operates everywhere between everything in a power relation is a claim only paralleled in evolutionary thinking by the strictest genetic determinist or epiphenomenologist (rarely actually wielded), and such a totalizing claim might only truly be made by a physicist. And physics would have little to say about a forgery. I do not claim that Theory is necessarily wrong or has the wrong intention, but I would agree with Cornell West when he says that much of it is inherently nihilistic. His essay, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy" could very well describe most of modern Theory when he says, "The crucial moves made by postmodern American philosophers ... resemble their counterparts in postmodern literary criticism [as both] have failed to project a new worldview, a countermovement" (1999, 209). Denying human nature and replacing it with nothing has little explanatory power except the recursive strategy of saying that they're freely admitting to saying nothing at all.

Evolution, though, is not an abstract or linguistic force and actually can be used to model patterns not just in the animal world but also in human social and individual behavior. No amount of Theory can hope to have such breadth as Deleuze or others would like. Roger Scruton summarizes Deleuze handily (and this can apply to most cultural Theory when it goes as far as Deleuze does), "As you can see (in Deleuze)... we are dealing with new words, but not with new concepts. In the place of definitions we are offered associations, and in the place of theories we are given terms that can be stretched from category to category like transparent wrapping, under which everything appears as it was, and yet at the same time strangely transfigured, brought into relation with alien matter like trophies in a shopping spree" (*Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* 2015, 189). It is, admissibly, very easy to cherry-pick examples from Theory that border on the incomprehensible (though I would say that they do not border, but instead receive their mail there), but at some point do we not have to hold Theory to some account of itself? Cultural accounts are incredibly important and giving voice to those marginalized groups is invaluable if we are moving toward a truly global community. This has never been my argument. My argument against Theory is its resistance to change and its self-recursive resistance to change by any other means than its own means which is a stripping down of the human individual into constituent parts, and in championing the individual it has strengthened the individual at the cost of the human. To merely say that Theory's end is to renounce ends and final meanings is also to admit to an end, and if we fashion an aesthetic stance based on pure contradiction for that sake and that sake alone, then at best it is incompatible with any evolutionary thinking and at worst it is a trivialization of human endeavor, progress and the value of life.

¹¹ This is perhaps unfair to Foucault, whose writing style I greatly admire and whose ideas I find the least muddled among the great throng of the Theory ilk.

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