Truth and the Pursuit of Happiness in *To The Lighthouse*

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the ethical implications and interconnectedness of truths and notions of happiness presented by Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* through the lenses of philosophers Aristotle and Jean-François Lyotard. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle establishes an inclusive notion of happiness as the end goal of most human activity yet as also without "fixed" definition. In Lyotard's *The Differend*, metanarratives are divulged as the root cause of the silencing faced by marginalized individuals that, as a result, cannot articulate their truths and thus suffer. Combined, these perspectives, applied to *To The Lighthouse*, reveal that a denial of the ability to articulate personal truths can limit one's capacity to achieve a happy life. They shed light on the ways human relations, as a result, demand respect for the idiosyncratic nature of truths and beliefs for such a satisfactory happiness to be attainable. This paper, considering the relationships presented by *To The Lighthouse*, concludes that an open-ended, perspectivist approach to matters of individual truth is required for individuals to have the means to achieve happiness.

INTRODUCTION

In Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, multifaceted pictures of personal truths and ideas of happiness are painted through streams-of-consciousness. In one sense, the subjective perspective of each character is fleshed out through this style, along with the way characters' viewpoints often differ and even contradict one another. In another sense, however, the novel also provides insight into how certain characters express universalizing notions of truth which erase difference and impose blanketing ideals of happiness onto others. What are the ethical implications of exercising a notion of happiness that attempts to coerce others into conformity? How might a limited definition of "truth" impact the happiness of (and/or impose suffering on to) those who fall outside of it? Through analysis of Woolf's novel in relation to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, it becomes clear that conceptualization of truths, ideals, and happiness should not be enforced as one-size-fits-all and that we might fail to recognize the suffering of others when the world is seen only through one limited lens.

REREADING ARISTOTLE AND LYOTARD

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* serves as means for broadening our definitions of happiness, especially as they relate to *The Differend* and *To The Lighthouse.* A more traditional account of both Aristotle and Lyotard might see each as developing fundamentally different arguments. However, this essay puts forward a rereading of both to develop a more plural approach to truth and happiness. This will serve as a basis for analyzing Woolf's novel.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle moves away from Plato's notion of the "form of the good" as something metaphysical, or, in other words, something that is intangible and of a "higher" form. Instead, Aristotle roots happiness in the soil of action – especially action in accordance with reason – which are much more material than the abstractions of platonic happiness. In Book I, Aristotle notes, "We have found, then, that the human function is activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason" (618). To Aristotle, happiness is not a result of a "fixed" ideal (616), a universalized truth, or something unattainably metaphysical. We see this established quickly in Book I: "We shall be satisfied to indicate the truth roughly and in outline; since our subject and our premises are things that hold good usually [but not universally], we shall be satisfied to draw conclusions of the same sort" (Aristotle 616). With respect to the subjective truths of each unique human being, he encourages a conceptualization of happiness that is exceedingly practical and dynamic. Instead of employing a stable notion of "truth" with regard to happiness, he encourages us to consider truth "roughly and in outline" – to see it as a matter of contingent perspective. To Aristotle, it might be said, we must be permitted to seek happiness through our own idiosyncratic logic, beliefs, and actions. As we will see via Lyotard, a refusal of these differential truths (usually those outside of the dominant language or views of the powerful) bars individuals from attaining the happiness that Aristotle insists we perpetually seek.

Yet, despite the open-ended approach to happiness in Book I, Aristotle's further theorization of happiness is susceptible to being interpreted through a deterministic lens. In Book X, Aristotle theorizes that "happiness is activity in accord with virtue," and "complete happiness will be its activity in accord with its proper virtue; and we have said that this activity is the activity of study" (Aristotle 627). At face value, it appears, on one hand, that Aristotle is arguing that happiness only results from an encompassing, broader sense of morality, and yet, on the other hand, that such morality only comes from study. Considering the silencing of distinct truths and happiness that universalizing approaches involve, this premise of Book X (utmost happiness being a result of study) becomes risky without context. Without the full context of the entire *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle appears to force happiness into conformity to one ideal practice. In further elaboration, though, we see how Aristotle does not intend to limit happiness to a universalizing ideal. "This activity [study] is supreme, since *understanding* is the supreme element in us" (Aristotle 627). He is not drawing the conclusion that one can only be happy through intellect resulting from study, instead he is arguing that, through our reasoning faculty, an understanding of what we ourselves and others define happiness as will enable us to live fuller, more satisfying versions of our truths. It is through study that one can identify the different varieties and shades of personal truths. He argues this in prior claims, suggesting, "The type of accounts we demand should accord with the subject matter; and questions about actions [and happiness involves activity] and expediency, like questions about health, have no fixed answers" (Aristotle 623). As we can see, there is no intention to place happiness into a limiting box – it is something that is manifested through a wide array of actions, something defined in a variety of ways. As he points out, questions related to happiness have "no fixed answers," which agrees with Woolf and Lyotard (though in a less radical sense) that truth and happiness are indeed a matter of perspective. This exemplifies how his argument tends to support the notion that truth, and thus happiness, are subjective concepts. Thus, when we face any assertion of a narrow truth or notion of happiness, we must recall that Aristotle is evidently willing to see the truth and happiness as otherwise, as things that should be approached "roughly and in outline" and as though they do not have "fixed answers" (616, 623).

It is also important to note that "happiness" has a variety of connotations in the context of his writings, as it is translated from the word "eudaimonia" that does not have one sufficient, single-word translation in English (Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics"). "Eudemonia" is, aside from happiness, synonymous with "flourishing," "success," and "fulfillment" (Kraut). These further definitions are also applicable to the way happiness is approached (directly and indirectly) in *To the Lighthouse*. Aristotle's move away from the essential, immovable form of the highest good is important to our discussion of subjective truth and the practicality of achieving happiness. With a subjective perspective of truth and happiness established, we can further understand Aristotle's practical approach to these subjects, as he sees happiness as the end to the means of many our "subordinate" actions (i.e. daily life activities). Thus, when applying Aristotle to Woolf's novel, we must implement Lyotard as a framework to account for the denial of happiness. We can consider this denial through what Lyotard calls "the *differend*," something that occurs when people are denied access to the means (that Aristotle identifies) that would otherwise allow them to enact their truths.

French postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's *The Differend* can be understood as radicalizing Aristotle's perspectivist approach to happiness and as proposing solutions to the denial of happiness and individual truths. *The Differend* is exemplary of Lyotard's rejection of "meta-narratives" – in other words, a rejection of universalizing philosophies/beliefs/politics/etc. He uses *The Differend* to consider the "silencing" of those excluded from the politics, systems, and languages imposed by meta-narratives (that usually benefit dominant/powerful social groups), thus forcing us to contend with solutions to these "wrongs." He begs us to question: How do universalizing notions of truth impose suffering and thus deny individuals and/or groups the means of reaching eudemonia?

APPLYING ARISTOTLE AND LYOTARD TO *TO THE LIGHTHOUSE*

Woolf articulates a subjective theory of truth, as she highlights the idiosyncratic nature of beliefs and reality through the novel's experimental style. Published in 1927, *To The Lighthouse* paints the narrative of the Ramsay family (Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their children) and their friends on holiday at their vacation home on the Isle of Skye in Scotland. The plot flows from an examination of various inner-most thoughts and the relations between characters, to a reflection on the passage of time from the from the perspective of an object, the then-empty vacation home, and finally ends with a return, ten years later, to the streams-of-consciousness of the surviving characters who return to the home. Through the narrative, she invites readers to interrogate our understanding of subject and object, our understanding of reality in comparison to others', and to query whether there is a "true world" outside of our "apparent world." We are encouraged through subjective viewpoints of truth and happiness presented by the novel to tackle our own understanding of what is "true" and "real." In fact, this is one of the functions of Mr. Ramsay, who asserts a worldview that he claims to be closer to the truth than others'. Through his alleged objectivity, especially in juxtaposition to characters like Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe (who present uncompromising subjectivity), his worldviews *reveal* a nuanced and subtle subjectivity to them that leaves his "objectivity" unstable.

This is vital to arguments being presented in this paper, as even internal contradictions chip away at what we understand as "universalizing." Mr. Ramsay is established as a philosopher, particularly a realist metaphysician. When Lily (a friend of the family) asked Andrew (son of the Ramsays) what Mr. Ramsay's books were about, he replied, "'Subject and object and the nature of reality. Think of a kitchen table,' he told her, 'When you're not there'" (Woolf 26). It becomes apparent that Mr. Ramsay, as a realist, is one who believes that referents of language have mind-independent existence. This also implies that he believes the ideals he holds are closer to a 'real' reality than what others believe, as he asserts a claim to absolute Truth. This perception of Mr. Ramsay is expressed by his son James, whose thoughts the narrator conveys: "What [Mr. Ramsay] said was true. It was always true. He was incapable of untruth; never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising" (Woolf 8). This exemplifies other characters' assumptions and adoptions of his approach to truth, which in turn distort their own personal understanding of truth.

Some criticisms of the realism and its implication of absolute truth adopted by Mr. Ramsay denote the philosophy as an unfair justification of power imbalances. Critics assert that seeing things as existing outside of human relations (existing in a metaphysical "true world" that we cannot perceive and is outside of language) serves to benefit dominant ideals to the detriment of those marginalized. This perspective can be utilized to uphold the notion of the metaphysical and blindly bind us to beliefs and morals that uphold unfair power structures without bases. This is because it puts "Truth" out of reach of scrutiny and excludes other interpretations of reality. In "Force of Law," deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida divulges in the writings of Montaigne and Pascal a "mystical foundation of authority" that serves as an adept criticism of the reliance on some fundamental structure of reality that is outside of our reach (939). This highlights the consequences we face when we don't consider relations as between people, when we don't see things like "the referent of a proper name" as "determined in terms of [their] location among the networks of names and of relations between names (worlds)" (Lyotard 50). This is a failure to see objects of human perception as determined by us, and rather as determined by something else outside of us. When we understand relations are imposed by a "mystical foundation of authority," we must face the fact that one "obeys [laws] not because they are just but because they have authority" (Derrida 939). When we blindly follow authority, we risk sacrificing groups of peoples' subjective experiences and perceptions for the sake of the power structures that are violent and merely *believed* to be "closer" to the truth, though this assumption is unfounded. Hence, Lyotard uses *The Differend* to argue for a more open approach to language and thus to our scopes of belief, an approach that seeks to include those excluded by absolutist rules of judgment. Ashley Woodward summarizes his philosophies, especially those presented in *The Differend*, as those which "reject all dominant political ideologies as master-narratives which exclude minorities and do violence to the heterogenous nature of social reality." This gets at the heart of *The Differend's* purpose: the value of relativism to reduce marginalization. Aristotle does not adopt as radical of an approach, but even he, as I argued above, a coninstills a sense of diversity in the means which satisfy a life of happiness and therefore supports a rejection of severe absolutism, which would say, for instance, that living well requires following a strict code of conduct or a universal moral rule. This approach to the "highest good" also then supports Lyotard's efforts for us to include those who are excluded by narrow truths and thus narrow means of achieving fulfillment. Hence, there is value in Mr. Ramsay's characterization and his assertion of narrow ideals, since we can compare them to broader ones and understand how limiting universalizing concepts can be. *To The Lighthouse* presents the variety of ways in which one singular concept – or object, or subject – can be perceived by dissecting right down to the mind of characters. When we see the ways in which one character has a wildly different idea of an ideal, of happiness, or even of themself in comparison to the values of another, we are provoked to begin including perspectives that previously existed outside of our scope of belief.

Woolf's characterization skillfully exhibits nuances which support the relativity of truth. She implements contrasting viewpoints, but not for the sake of determining which is more accurate. Instead, each position respectively stands with validity. This is notable, as one character's truths pinned against another's remain stable in the sense that both perspectives, though completely different, take on truth value regardless. Woolf includes these opposing realities/beliefs/truths in a manner that exemplifies their ability to coexist, even though this would, at face value, appear contradictory. For example, Charles Tansley believes "women can't paint, women can't write" and yet, Lily Briscoe paints anyways because she believes the opposites of his assertions (Woolf 51). In the process, neither versions of reality are diminished (though readers can certainly decide which argument they side with themselves), provoking readers to conceptualize irreconcilable ideas as ones that can still simultaneously exist. This furthers our questioning of the stability of absolutes, then, as we must then acknowledge that ideas which cannot contend with each other can still coexist as "true." As Aristotle would say, there are no "fixed answers"—though metaphysicians do attempt to enforce such answers, we cannot actually determine which distinct versions of reality are closer to the "truth" than others. Defining truth is not a scientific or metaphysical matter, but a matter of language contingencies and power structures that deem certain truths more "truthful" than others, simply because they ae the agreed upon truths of those in power. This coexistence of multiple perspectives is even exemplified within characters during introspection. Although Mr. Ramsay is the man of 'truth,' of seemingly unwavering belief in his philosophies, even he reveals a degree of doubt. Much of his contempt for himself is rooted in concern for the validity and endurance of his philosophies. Likening the advance of knowledge to reaching the end of the alphabet, he worries about how far he will get:

> How many men in a thousand million, he asked himself, reach Z after all? "One perhaps." One in a generation. Is he to be blamed then if he is not that one? Provided he has toiled honestly, given to the best of his power, and till he has no more left to give? And his fame lasts how long? It is permissible even for a dying hero to think before he dies how men will speak of him hereafter. His fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? (Woolf 38)

His inner stream-of-consciousness reveals the questioning of his own logic that is never depicted outwardly. Hence, we face a contradiction that destabilizes the outward assertion of all-encompassing truths. Mr. Ramsay exemplifies this through contrast in what he "knows" (stable, unmovable truths and logic) versus what he doubts – doubting himself, considering that he could have it all wrong, that his work is irrelevant, that he might miss the mark and be forgotten completely. In the sense of Lyotard, he is concerned with an attempt to stabilize "referents" in such a strict manner that he might be able to be certain of how he and his beliefs would be perceived from the grave. This is akin to his universalizing, oppressive approach to language and truths, but it is still revealing as it exposes lapses in his logic. As stated formerly, this is an example of an internal contradiction chipping away at the structure of universals. This specific example is subtle, but when multiple characters' perspectives on the same subject are juxtaposed, revealing contrasts, the slight chipping becomes a landslide.

We can consider the contentions between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay as a strong argument in favor of the subjectivity of truth. In fact, their disagreements structure the whole of the novel, as it is premised entirely upon the postponement of the trip to the lighthouse. Mrs. Ramsay tells a young James, as the opening line of the novel, that they can go to the lighthouse, "'if it will be fine tomorrow'" (Woolf 7). In only the second line of dialogue, Mr. Ramsay argues against this, stating, "'It won't be fine'" (Wolf 8). This sparks a chasm on their approach to parenting, as Mr. Ramsay lives a life of stubbornness that is quite different than the sensitive approach Mrs. Ramsay takes:

> [Mr. Ramsay] never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all of his own children, who, sprung from his loins, should be aware from childhood that life is difficult; facts uncompromising; and the passage to that fabled land where our brightest hopes are extinguished, our frail barks founder in darkness (here Mr. Ramsay would straighten his back and narrow his little blue eyes upon the horizon), one that needs, above all, courage, truth, and the power to endure (Woolf 8).

After multiple chapters of Mr. Ramsay bearing down on his truth, his belief that they will not be able to go to the lighthouse, a revealing interaction occurs between James and Mrs. Ramsay; "In a moment he would ask her, 'Are we going to the Lighthouse?' And she would have to say, 'No; not tomorrow; your father says not.'…And she was certain that he was thinking, we are not going to the Lighthouse tomorrow; and she thought, he will remember that all his life" (Woolf 65). Mrs. Ramsay, reflecting after the moment, insists, "Children never forget. For this reason, it was so important what one said, and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed" (Woolf 65). The dichotomy between their approaches to parenting reveals a deeply different consideration for the happiness and truths of others. Woolf places weight onto this concrete event – going to the lighthouse – that is symbolic of much more. It becomes apparent that their disagreement is rooted in different, absolute ideas of the "highest good," and thus they are unable to articulate a compromise. Mr. Ramsay is willing to sacrifice the happiness of his son for his own honor of possessing the truth of what will happen the following day, for him to reign over others, whereas Mrs. Ramsay has a keen perception for the experiences and sufferings of others and thus exerts herself with concern for them. Not only does Mr. Ramsay work hard to uphold his own points, but he subordinates and excludes the viewpoints of others to do so. As Lyotard puts it, "the latter is deprivation, the former a negation" (10). The dominant language either deprives individuals the means to articulate their truths, or it negates their truths by forcing the marginalized to articulate them in the language of the oppressors. Thus, when Mr. Ramsay invokes this power, he creates a victim who is wronged, an individual who "is reduced to silence" (Lyotard 10). Thus, their contrast in ideals is not important solely for the narrative tension, but for the deprivation of truth (that of Mrs. Ramsay and their children) it depicts to leads us into further ethical questioning.

Regarding the "highest good" and moral difference, we again approach Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Drawing from Book I, we find ourselves only at the start of his theorization of happiness, yet we are able to identify some of the most important premises of his argument: "Honor, pleasure, understanding, and every virtue we certainly choose because of themselves, since we would choose each of them even if it had no further result; but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that through them we shall be happy" (Aristotle 618). Here he clarifies that the end goal of many actions – practical means – is happiness. Our own definition of happiness is a lone concept, a consuming goal, that mediates much of our activity. He goes on to solidify this point, stating "Happiness appears to be one of the most divine things, since the prize and goal of virtue appears to be the best good, something divine…[happiness] is what we all aim at in all our other actions" (Aristotle 621). Aristotle insists that everything we do and seek, especially actions which reflect our morals, truths, and beliefs we hold, are for the sake of the "highest good," which he deems to be happiness. He argues this "good" to be the truest end to our means. "Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of things achievable in action" (Aristotle 618). All our actions are considered as aiming to reach happiness. Considering the former contention through both Aristotle and Lyotard, Woolf depicts how happiness cannot be achieved if the means through which one conjures their definition of happiness aren't available to them. Aristotle makes it clear that action in accordance with our definition of virtue, what we believe is true and best, is what allows one to reach the end goal of happiness. Whereas Lyotard demonstrates how a silencing can take place when our virtues, our truths, do not fit into pre-existing constructs, leading to a degree of inactivity and thus suffering (13).

Considering these perspectives combined, if the ways in which one defines and articulates their ideals aren't permitted in their circumstances, they face a Lyotardian silencing which signifies a "wrong" as well as an inhibition in their ability to attain Aristotelian happiness. Hence, Mr. Ramsay's silencing of Mrs. Ramsay's ideals become a *differend*, "the case where the plaintiff is divested the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim" (Lyotard 9). This is a vital piece of the puzzle that is Lyotard's argument, as he proposed *differends* as means to expose the ways in which marginalized peoples cannot articulate or bring forth the crimes committed against them. When they attempt to do so, the "proof" they are obligated to supply (to satisfy "common sense") is written and expected in the language of the oppressor – a language that inherently and purposefully disempowers and excludes marginalized individuals. Lyotard calls these "procedures" of "truth" employed by the powerful "phrase regimes," and these "phrase regimes" exist to silence truths that exist outside the limiting ideas, reasoning, and logic of the truth held by the oppressors. This silencing becomes a question of ethics, as it becomes clear that the silenced party is deprived of means to reach happiness. It is not being argued here that their ideas of happiness ought to be the same – that is not the case at all. What is at stake is the failure of each party to make room for the other's notion of happiness so that it can be attained through action (in accordance with it). Admittedly, Mrs. Ramsay fails to make space for Mr. Ramsay's truths just as he does to her, but she does not hold patriarchal power over him through which she can silence his articulations or manifestations of his point of view. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay is the individual left wronged. This is the vital difference: Mr. Ramsay domineers. This power imbalance is divulged by Lyotard, who explains, "One 'plays the game' permitted by these rules [dominant modes of belief]; and the addressee's rejoinder shows that he or she does not observe them. Either way, it comes down to the same thing: the phrases, whose addressor he or she is, satisfy or do not satisfy the rules" (19). Mrs. Ramsay can "simulate that [she] satisfies the rules" established by Mr. Ramsay, but it is still dishonest to her actual beliefs, the actual ways in which she would articulate what she thinks (Lyotard 19). Mrs. Ramsay's conformity can be seen in another one of her reflections:

> And so she went down and said to her husband, Why must they grow up and lose it all? Never will they be so happy again. And he was angry. Why take such a gloomy view of life? he said. It is not sensible. For it was odd; and she believed it to be true; that with all his gloom and desperation he was happier, more hopeful on the whole, than she was. Less exposed to human worries--perhaps that was it. He had always his work to fall back on. Not that she herself was 'pessimistic,' as he accused her of being (Woolf 62).

Mrs. Ramsay accepts his truth as hers, without question, throwing her own to the side since it serves no purpose in its silenced state. These are damaging conditions, conditions which deprive Mrs. Ramsay of reaching happiness, and even enables her, in her search for control, to exert the same silencing on to others.

WOOLF AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENDS

Woolf masterfully paints *differends* while depicting how, as a result, happiness suffers. Through her narrator, she places the reader in contrasting perspectives, between characters and even within the mind of a single character, that cannot contend with each other on common grounds. This is demonstrated not only in the examples of Mrs. and Mr. Ramsay but also in their daughter Cam's sense of both beauty and tyranny within her father and Lily Briscoe's simultaneous admiration and disdain for Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, for instance (Woolf 173, 178). Yet, Woolf does not take a dialectical approach, taking thesis and antithesis and attempting to synthesize them — in fact, she allows the opposing, nuanced truths to exist in tandem without forcing them to meld with each other. She allows truths and virtues to exist as they are in a manner that is honest to the way characters perceive them, even if it is not the dominant ideal imposed by their social structures. She does not force the differences into logic, she does not silence them *as they exist*. On the other hand, she also doesn't shy away from the reality of human relations nor the wrongs we commit against one another, as Lyotard observes. As a result, she depicts the circumstantial silencing of ideas outside of dominant belief and what the consequences are. Thus, when character ideals are non-conforming, their ability to actualize these beliefs in their physical lives, outside of their inner stream-of-consciousness, is at risk.

It is especially through interactions and power imbalances that Woolf invokes *differends*. In the ways certain characters exist amongst others, especially beneath others, we can see how non-conforming ideals are subordinated by dominant modes of belief. Mr. Ramsay is tyrannical in this way, often shutting down language which does not uphold or affirm his own, as in his declaration, "It won't be fine [tomorrow]" (Woolf 8). Perhaps modeling after this authoritarian figure in her life, Mrs. Ramsay, though a victim herself, creates victims as well. She does so by imposing her truths and ideals on to others, as she believes actions carried out according to her beliefs, her notions of virtue in an Aristotelian sense, will bring them happiness. An example of one of Mrs. Ramsay's universalizing ideals is that she believes, "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life" (Woolf 53). If she were to merely hold this belief herself, it may not be so damaging, but she "insist[s] that [Lily] must, Minta must, they all must marry" (Woolf 52-53). Lyotard argues that the outcomes of such impositions and forced conformity to ideals that exclude individuals are harmful. He argues that the silencing nature of the conformity is a "sign that something remains to be phrased which is not," that the silenced are being "refused not only life but also the expression of the wrong done [to] them" (Lyotard 56-57). Mrs. Ramsay's ideals are confirmed to be silencing and life-denying when Lily tackles these impositions and identifies the means that would satisfy her.

> Mrs. Ramsay has faded and gone, she thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas…For a moment Lily, standing there, triumphed over Mrs. Ramsay, how she had never married, not even Mr. Bankes. Mrs. Ramsay had planned it. Perhaps, had she lived, she would have compelled it (Woolf 178).

Lily felt that Mrs. Ramsay "led her victims…to the altar" (Woolf 103). Through these assertions, we can see how self-determined activities (that are the means to reach the end that is happiness), rather than imposed ideals of others, will allow one to actualize the end goal of happiness. Lily does not "simulate that [she] satisfies the rules" established by Mr. or Mrs. Ramsay, and this becomes a point of contention (Lyotard 19). There is a pivotal moment of reflection which addresses the ways that dominant ideals and modes of belief convolute and exclude those whose happiness exists outside the formers' realms: "[Mr. Ramsay], she thought…never gave; that man took. [Lily], on the other hand, would be forced to give" (Woolf 153). Lily felt pressured not only to give him sympathy (the emotional labor he demanded of women) but also forced to uphold ideals and act in ways which would overshadow her own autonomy. The ideals held and foisted by others often forced her to convolute her own definition of fulfillment. Lily goes on to reflect, "Mrs. Ramsay had given, Giving, giving, giving, she had died – and had left all this. Really, she was angry with Mrs. Ramsay" (Woolf 153). This phrase exemplifies a shift from the contention between her and Mr. Ramsay to a contention between Mrs. Ramsay and her reality. There are significant damages done by the silencing structures these women exist within.

Both Lily and Mrs. Ramsay were individuals in marginalized positions that were excluded from dominant modes of belief. At the time, beliefs akin to those of Charles Tansley were the norm. He asserted, "Women can't paint, women can't write" (Woolf 51). Thus, in this subordinate position, Mrs. Ramsay lived a life which sacrificed her own fulfillment for the sake of others. She died without articulating her ideals, without enacting them, and, consequently, without an achievement of the "highest good" for herself. She even questioned her fulfillment while alive, "But what have I done with my life? Thought Mrs. Ramsay," though she was never able to come to her own conclusion of what would have truly fulfilled her (Woolf 85). Hence, one could argue that Mrs. Ramsay dies without ever articulating, and thus never actualizing, her own truth – and so, according to Aristotle, she died without ever achieving a full sense of happiness. Lily resents this, likely because she is threatened by the same set of circumstances. She, too, is seen as subordinate, meant to fulfill the desires of men (i.e. Mr. Ramsay's demands for sympathy), and marginalized in the scope of the dominant ideals' notions of happiness (i.e. "an unmarried woman has missed the best of life"). This frightens Lily and is why Lily's realization (and manifestation) of her own truth is so vital to end her suffering and allow her to pursue happiness. This is the danger, the ethical interrogation we face when considering the silenced truths that beg to be "put into phrases" and the denial of happiness that silenced individuals experience (Lyotard 13).

Lyotard further argues a *differend* to be not just a silencing or a wronging, but a call to action:

> [When] something ‘asks’ to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence…that they must be allows to institute idioms which do not yet exist (13).

The weight of the “institution of new idioms” falls upon Lily, as her ideals are so far outside of dominant ones that she cannot articulate them with the tools she is given. What she does instead of accepting these oppressive forces is valuable. She rejects universalizing truths imposed by others, such as the notions that “women can’t paint” and that “an unmarried woman has missed the best of life,” by acting against them (Woolf 51, 53). Instead, she paints and does not marry, though throughout the novel she grapples with succumbing to these dominant ideals. At the end of the novel, we can see that Lily allows herself to articulate new “metaphors” (in Lyotard’s sense) through the honest depiction of her perceptions through her painting, “There it was – her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues…its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics…it would be destroyed. But what did that matter?...Yes, she thought, I have had my vision” (Woolf 211). This scene is the very action of “instituting new idioms” that Lyotard calls for. Through her painting, she actualizes her truth and allows it to be articulated in a novel way. It is the enactment of Lyotard’s assertion that we must allow new ways of speaking and thinking into our belief systems to allow individuals, who have not had a voice, the chance to lead a fulfilling life (13). In the end, Lily is able to articulate her own mode of seeing and breaks free of the silencing she faces. She finally realizes her vision and completes her painting which stands as a metaphor for Aristotle’s “activity in accordance with virtue” (619). In other words, her painting is a manifestation of the whole sum of life activities that are honest to our personal values (not imposed, silencing ones) and thus meet our end goal of happiness not in just one instance, but over the course of a “complete life” (Aristotle 618). Through her art she manifests her own perspective, resolving her *differend* and permitting her to enact means which fulfill her definition of happiness.

CONCLUSION

Both Aristotle and Lyotard help us to pose the question: What does it mean to live a fulfilling, ethical life? They give us a broadened sense of ‘truth’ to aid us in determining what *our* truth is, what others’ truths are, what is ethical, and how happiness can be achieved for everyone. Combined, these efforts spell out a call to action which demands re-evaluation and broadening of absolutist ideologies which limit marginalized individual’s and/or group’s accessibility to the “highest good,” happiness. They ask us to consider the perspectives of others in our own values for the sake of achieving societies that silence none and empower all with the means to reach fulfillment. As Lyotard urges us to broaden the dominant language and structures to include marginalized perspectives, thus expanding everyone’s right to happiness, we can envision happiness as a diverse range of concepts and practices that can be added together to reach a sum of a communal happiness. His philosophies, in light of *To The Lighthouse*, reject the notion that one ideal happiness can be applied to all. Together, Aristotle asserts that we must *act* in accordance with our personal truths and Lyotard demands space for excluded truths to be given voices so that those marginalized and silenced can be alleviated of their suffering. Through an application of these philosophies to Woolf, we see how the ability to voice individual, subjective truths enables people to ethically pursue lives of happiness and fulfillment.

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