



Prison Abolition and the Importance of Home

Philosophy for Humans is an OPEEP Learning Community

Zine #2, 2025

Listen Here:

<https://linktr.ee/P4Hplaylist>



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Cover Illustration by Aaron

Introduction, Amy

Amid a reflection that connects the Sixth Extinction to Melville's *Benito Cereno* to working-class rebellion to perpetually bummed out teachers, Ross Gay's *Inciting Joy* (2002, page 152) proposes that the purpose of a learning community is to:

MAKE
BEAUTIFUL
SHIT
TOGETHER!

It is in such a spirit that we offer this second issue of our 'zine.

For the past 50 months or so, Philosophy for Humans members have met biweekly to forge a learning community in the middle of a prison. We are a collection of incarcerated people at Southeastern Correctional Institution and free people connected in one way or another to The Ohio State University.

In this issue, we wrestle with the sources of prison abolition. Mr. P's "Disregarded" tightly sums up the condition of the currently incarcerated. Jake's "All Pain Is Undeserved" names the mistake at the heart of retributivism. JD's "Make It Right" details intergenerational trauma from cycles of violence and addiction. Farmer John's "You're Just a Dog" calls our attention to the many relationships cruelly undone by incarceration. IS's "Lord Pass Me a Rope" reminds us of the connection between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the Prison-Industrial complex.

This issue of our 'zine also recognizes sources of joy despite the ruinous institutions within which we live and defiantly grow. Mike made a playlist that incites and delights. Aaron was inspired by the words of other members to draw bittersweet memorials. Jacob learned not to take going home for granted. Our pressed-pennies collection depicts the precious particulars of our lives. Ken generated memes (please reshare widely!). And Mike dared to tell a few jokes.

The order of our contributions toggles back-and-forth between these themes not to dull the pain but rather as continual reminder of the pleasures that power a life-long commitment to building the beloved community. We hope these offerings are part of a broader healing process.

Learn more our efforts to render prisons obsolete at <https://philosophy.osu.edu/p4h>. We invite you to send your reflections to philosophy4humans@osu.edu.

Disregarded, Mr. P

Hello

Echo

Can anybody hear me?

What does the caged bird have in common with the caged man?

Systemic patterns and routines, Muted Voices and moot Dreams,

Yeah we sing, we sing so loud we scream

Begging for Assistance, Praying For Forgiveness, Pleading For

Acceptance, These caged confines give the false

Perception of Justice, Shut off from humanity, isolated

in vacancy, subjugated to Authority

Disregarded in the age of tolerance 'cause you don't know my

condition, you couldn't understand my circumstances,

so how dare you judge me

Relegate me State Property and Deny me my Justiciable Equity

A capitalist society is just as culpable because it takes a village. I

wasn't born a convict

In a world where needs come second to desires, and multimedia

outlets glamorize drug suppliers and political liars, a

child's career path is determined by which side of the

train tracks he resides

Here the children of unplanned pregnancies, unappreciated

minds, and Idle time collide, leaving behind the debris

from unfulfilled interest

We were in prison Long before, we were imprisoned

Pre-destined limitations coerce our occupational decision-

making

Intellectual social deserts leave imaginations parched

How do you mimic what you can't envision? Recurring images of

broken lineages Foreshadow this system's true

intentions

Separate the man from the women, so boy meets world

precociously, Unsophisticated socially

and uncouthed in the ways of the world we become

either statistic or victim to this double-edged sword

Disregarded



Drawing for "Disregarded," Aaron

A montage of album covers, Mike



The album montage is a visual representation of this playlist of Old School & New School tunes. These songs are meant to uplift or even shock the listener. They aid in getting important conversations started in our society. Many of these songs serve as time capsules, giving peeks into the past. Others give visions of the future.

All Pain Is Undeserved, Jake

Edmund Husserl made a career of observing consciousness. Your consciousness is everything that you experience: sights, sounds, sensations, emotions, thoughts.

Husserl noticed that consciousness is incredibly rich. We never simply hear a voice, notice a bird in the distance, or taste a sip of coffee, but rather we are always experiencing many things at once.

When we pay attention, we find that each moment of experience is rich with content that we are not in the habit of noticing.

Husserl also noticed that, although consciousness is full, it is also invisible. When I'm having an experience, I always "see" the thing that I am experiencing, even if it's something that I've imagined. What I don't see, however, is my consciousness itself. My consciousness is like a camera that can see everything except itself; wherever it looks, it is not. Since my consciousness does all of my experiencing, it can never be something *that* I experience. As a result, there will never be something I can look at and say, "There! That's my consciousness." Years later, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre would put this point dramatically: consciousness is nothing, since it is not something that I can ever locate or experience in the world.

Consciousness is distinct from every other part of a person. My consciousness observes my body, so it is not my body. It observes my past, so it is not my past. My consciousness is not even my character: I experience myself as being kind or cruel, deceitful or honest, and because these features belong to my experience, I know that they are not my experience. None of my distinguishing features belong to my consciousness.

Suppose that I want to punish another person: I hate Max because of the person he is and the things he's done, and I want to hurt him. But when I punish Max for these reasons, who suffers? His actions are past, and I don't even have the power to prevent them, let alone to punish them. It's also impossible to

punish his character. Max might be a wicked person, but there's nothing I can do to punish his wickedness. Max's character might change over time, but it can't suffer harms in the way that a person can. So, it's neither his actions nor his character, but his consciousness that suffers. I lash out at his consciousness because it's the only thing I can reach, but it's never the case that his consciousness is the thing that did wrong. Max's personality is rotten, and his actions hurt me, but his consciousness just happens to live here. It's a matter of bad fortune that it's in this body rather than in mine, or the Dalai Lama's, or a duck's. Consciousness can be the victim of crimes, but it can never commit them. Therefore, all punishment is punishment of the innocent.

*

I've argued that a person's consciousness is not responsible for the things their personality does. If I'm right, then what follows about love? The person I love is also a consciousness that happens to live in a body. His consciousness benefits from being paired with his personality: I love him because of who he is and what he's done, and because I love him, I want him to be happy. But why should his consciousness get credit for things it didn't do? If I reject hatred, should I also reject that human beings can be worthy of love?

No! It's true that, in my view, the person I love (his consciousness) is not responsible for the parts of himself that invite me to love him. But it is not these features that make him worthy of love. Consciousness itself deserves love. To take a phrase from the vegan philosopher Matthew C. Halterman, we are a world of "hungry, beautiful animals." We are feeling-things, we are both needy and radically dependent on a world we can't control, and for these reasons alone we deserve care. There's nothing our characters can do to change what our minds deserve. 'Deserving to suffer,' like consciousness, disappears as soon as we try to find a place for it; it does not exist anywhere in the world. 'Deserving to be loved,' on the other hand, is found everywhere, because it needs nothing more than a being that would benefit from care.

*

My description of Husserl's thought derives from Sarah Bakewell's *At the Existentialist Café* as well as lectures by Tamar Rudavsky (as filtered through my understanding and memory). This paper also draws from J. David Velleman's wonderful work on love and respect for persons. I'll conclude by introducing a relevant passage from Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Breakfast of Champions*:

His situation, insofar as he was a machine, was complex, tragic, and laughable. But the sacred part of him, his awareness, remained an unwavering band of light.

And this book is being written by a meat machine in cooperation with a machine made of metal and plastic...And at the core of the writing meat machine is something sacred, which is an unwavering band of light.

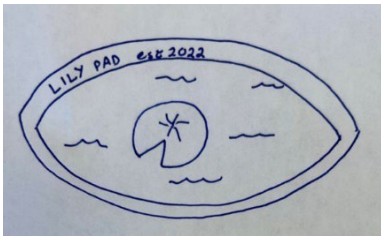
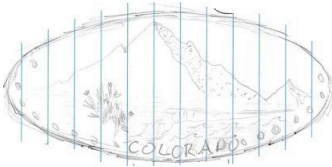
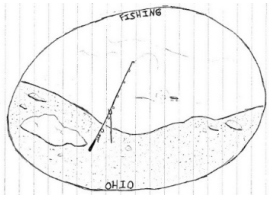
At the core of each person who reads this book is a band of unwavering light.

My doorbell has just rung in my New York apartment. And I know what I will find when I open my front door: an unwavering band of light.

We have tremendous power to change our values and to improve upon our pasts, but we are not fully defined by our actions no matter what we do. Our right to enjoy the world is not rooted in what we might do, but in what we must experience, and no conscious thing is unworthy.

Home, Various Artists

These flattened-penny coins represent, to the people who drew them, *home*. Home, with its comfort and security, is one of the irreplaceable things that prison robs from the incarcerated. These pennies are a gentle reminder of the value of home.



Make It Right, JD

Since the age of twelve,
I've been in and out of jail cells.
Tried but I done failed well,
Only time will tell now.
Tired of being abused, used,
Tired of being confused too.
Lord I'm reaching out to you,
Help me change my gray to Blue.
I never went to high school,
Actin' like a fuckin' fool.
My excuse is what I been through
Excuse is who I'm kin to.
My Daddy wasn't never there,
Seemed like momma didn't care.
When I got sent to foster care
No one had no time to spare
I'm layin in a Strangers Bed
Sometimes wishin' I was dead.
I'm wonderin' what the stranger did
And if he was a problem kid?
Who's gonna play with my brother now?
Who's gonna help my sister out?
Who's gonna cover Mom's up
When she's drunk and passed out?

Make it right!

You're Just a Dog, Farmer John

You died today and it's been giving me some grief, but I'm sure I'll be fine, because you're just a dog. I'd like to talk of you, remember, and let some of this out but I don't, because you're just a dog. I want to tell them I named you Hank cause it's easier to yell a single syllable, and how when I sprung you from jail you were covered in fleas and smelled like pee. I want to share your quirks, like your 100-pound bark, insatiable need to chase cats, or your absolute hatred of horses. A million things I could say: waking with your hair in my mouth, growling when I wake you too early, midnight potty breaks when I'd swear you were sorry to wake me. Truck rides for your favorite burgers, chasing deer through the beans and cats in the barn. Thousands of pee stops on trail while our girls laughed at us, napping on the couch to our favorite shows, huddling in fear when the gods were bowling, and pizza, hell yeah pizza. What idiots we looked like howling together, but you loved it so. That time you got embarrassed when I had to carry you down that cliff, laughing shortly after at how much worse your mom did. So many miles together hiking, running, and walking. Thousands more in the truck, boats, and tractors. You were always so happy just to be there. Oh and the countless times I needed you. Those days nothing goes right wagged away by your fluffy tail. When I couldn't face the world, I could face you. All the tears, rantings, anger and depression you witnessed and never once held against me, because you're just a dog. Then our world was torn apart. I had to leave and you had to move to town. I think we hated it the same, being trapped in an unfamiliar place far from the world we loved. It's been years now since you were my dog, more than a decade since I rescued you and I'd wished you could've rescued me, but you're just a dog.

But you're not just a dog, you were my friend. My confidant, fishing buddy, hiking partner, farm hand and first mate. Running coach, constant companion, and silent therapist. A quarter of my life you were there protecting me and the ones I cherished most. You kept protecting them when I couldn't. I wish I could've seen you, pet you, or even just had a good howling

these last few years. Your wagging tail would really brighten this gray world I now live in. I held hope you might see me again, but you won't. I'd even hoped you might lead me to those we cherish the most, but that chance passed with you. If only I could have worked harder to get back to you sooner, but I couldn't. I want to cry, scream, and shout, but I can't. I wish I could have comforted your passing, shared a tear with your loved ones, or pet your head one last time, but I can't reach that far. The world is different, darker, and lonely without you in it. I could sure use a friend like you to help me through. A way to know I'm not alone. I wish I could just cry and lose myself in a comforting hug to know there's still good and love in the world.

But I can't, I'm just an inmate.

Rest in peace Hank, your memory is still leading me down life's trail.

Hank



Hank, Aaron

Finding Joy: Anti-Jokes for Anti-Prison, Mike

(Hey, if we're about prison abolition, or anti-prison, why not ditch the jokes and go for anti-jokes?)

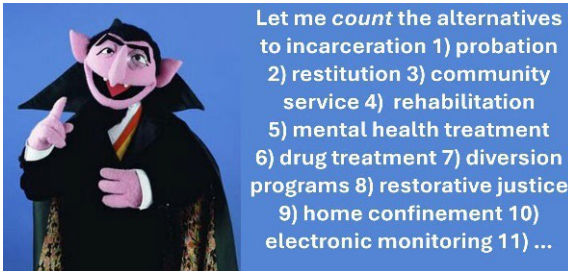
Why was six afraid of seven? It wasn't. Numbers aren't sentient and are incapable of feeling fear.

Why won't you ever find an elephant hiding behind a tree? 'Cause they are really good at it.

You can pick your nose. You can pick your friends. But you can't rob a bank. That's a felony.

Finding Joy: The Joke Section

Abolition Memes, Ken



What is Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) Abolition?

“PIC abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.” from criticalresistance.org

Lord Pass Me a Rope, IS

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Knocked out drugged to a sea shore.

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Bound side by side in a hull of a vessel.

Lord Pass Me a Rope

The weak moan while the strong groan.

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Hard to breathe fast to bleed

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Awake among the dead forced to be fed.

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Ankles fit the shackles the back meets the whip

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Sold off a block according to the sound of a cock.

Lord Pass Me a Rope

Life seems a deep dark pit the sight of a noosed rope is a comfort
to my soul,

Not for my tender neck, but for my strong waist, as I'm pulled out
of the pit by an abolitionist

All praise to abolitionism for now and then.

We Each Go Home, Jacob

Once a week, my friends and I attend buzzer trivia night at *Hank's Texas BBQ*. The categories are silly, low-effort—identify the song played on kazoo, name that nineties sitcom—and the atmosphere is amiable, with respectfully low chatter as the questions roll out. My friends and I have plenty of time for chatting. We share stories about our weeks, tease each other about flubbed answers, order soda and snacks for the table. At the end of four rounds of trivia, we part with laughter and waves. We each go home.

Three times a week, on Zoom. I teach my philosophy course, *Death and the Meaning of Life*. I lecture on readings about things the students really care about, death, immortality, boredom, Buddhism, God, existentialism, fulfillment. I typically prepare a few discussion prompts, but I rarely use them. Questions, comments, objections pour from the students, and I barely need to direct them to generate a collaborative discussion. At the end of each class, I dismiss them. With a sprinkling of “Thank you” and “Have a nice day,” they log off. We each go home.

Every other week, I visit Southeastern Correctional Institution (SCI), for the Philosophy 4 Humans learning community. The outside members—those of us who live in and around Columbus—typically arrive first, and arrange the chairs in the meeting room. I work with pleasant anticipation, excited for the inside members—those who live at SCI—to enter through the far doors. When they do, there's smiles, and handshakes, and “What've you been up to since last time?” and comforting warmth. We sit in a circle, outsiders and insiders intermingled, and discuss the readings, discuss our plans, discuss the type of community we want to be. The meetings are long, often demanding, as we work through abstract ideas like the good life, nature, prison abolition; and the connections of these abstract ideas to our personal experiences. Sometimes the debate gets heated. Always, it's respectful, and always it ends with another round of smiles, and handshakes, and “I can't wait to see you next time.” Then I go home.

And on the long car ride, through the forested hills, under the nighttime sky, I think about how not everyone is really going home, tonight. I'm used to the assumption that, after each social event, everyone returns to a place where they feel

comforted, respected, and free. It's a disorienting jolt, to find this expectation thwarted. It makes me wish for better for my inside friends. It makes me awed at the deeply unjust ways humans deal with each other. Whenever this disparity occurs to me, my conviction is reinforced: we need to end prisons.