KEEPING IT REAL

(If Real Exists)

An RPE KS3 E-newsletter

Newstead Wood School

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INTRODUCTION

Hello, and thank you for reading the second edition of KIR(IRE)! This time around, I wanted to tell you something I hope will genuinely help some of you. Most of the articles in this magazine are ultimately to prompt some philosophical thinking, but in this edition, I would like to point you towards a specific one. The statement is "Angels have no impact on the life of a Muslim," and it was written by a friend of mine in 9G. It's a beautifully structured piece, and is of the type you'll usually have to write in RPE classes. I hope you find the points, development and structuring helpful in your own writing, and have a wonderful half-term ahead.

Read and (hopefully) enjoy!

Oluwatoni Adesanya

For questions and enquiries, or to submit your own article, you can email me or talk to Mrs Jackson.

The Problem(s) of Evil

One of the main problems people have with religion- Christianity especially- is the alleged existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent God who watches over the Earth and all that inhabit it. Their issue isn't with God in itself, but that there's still evil in the world, evil that affects everyone at least once a day. If God is actually omniscient, then he would know when and where evil was happening, his omnipotence would mean he had the power to end all evil, and his omnibenevolence means that he would want to end all evil. Despite all this, though he doesn't. So, what's up with that? Well, atheists argue that using basic philosophical reasoning, you cannot hold two contradicting premises to be true. One or the other has to give, and since there's no denying the existence of evil, then the thing to give up and let down is God. But is there any way for the believers out there to reason their way back? That's what I'll be looking at today.

There are numerous theories that could be taken as arguments- my favourite (by far) is one where Leibniz suggests that God is truly all these omni-qualities, and there are a great number of worlds that could possibly be created. He then reasons that since a world with logical contradictions within it cannot exist, God created the best possible world, and he didn't create evil- in fact, he says, evil is technically just the absence of good, so God didn't create evil, but that it just exists because good exists. Of course, there's a large number of holes in this theory, not least because it doesn't explain why evil still exists, but it is rather refreshing, I think. Now though, let's look at some (somewhat) plausible ones.

Firstly, we must acknowledge that a simple solution to the problem would be giving up an omni-attribute of God's. If we drop omnipotence, it's reasonable to say that God doesn't have the power to stop all evil. Dismissing omniscience would mean that He doesn't know about all

evil. Surprisingly, the easiest one to let go of for me is his omnibenevolence. Biblical evidence, GOD'S OWN BOOK, is full of examples where God was positively wrathful- cases in point being the Great Flood and the Israelites' 40 years in the wilderness. If those were only to teach people a lesson, is it so hard to believe evil could exist under him? The problem here, though, is that the lack of any of these omni-attributes is a contradiction of most peoples' understanding of God, which is a whole new problem. Moving on...

There are multiple known problems of Evil, but the three most common, I think, are the natural, logical, and moral problems. The logical problem of evil is the one most theists turn to. They say that in His quest to make the world as Good as possible, he gave humans free will and reasoning, to do what they thought right and to help others. Of course, with free will, you can't give it to some and withhold it from others. As a result, there are people who will use their free will to do evil, but overall, the world is supposed to be a better place, because everyone can choose what happens to them OR how they will react to it (a principle of stoicism). However, there are a few criticisms of this approach. Firstly, some people end up using their free will to take that of others away, like the basic principle of slavery. In addition, this only solves the moral problem of evil- evil caused by the actions of moral agents, like humans. It does not solve the issues of climate problems, or earthquakes, or landfalls. Those things are part of the natural problem of evil.

The natural problem of evil covers things humans cannot control, including things like the California wildfires and Hurricane Katrina. We certainly did not manipulate the atmosphere or fill the clouds- things that God is quoted to be responsible for in the Bible (obviously not in those specific words). So how do we counteract this? Well, a reigning theory is that for us to know what good feels like, we need to experience what evil is in contrast; God is just trying to shape us into his image for us. An argument against this would be that we can experience evil that is proportional to the good we face as opposed to events that affect millions. In addition

to this, sometimes it is difficult to draw the line between natural and moral evil. Another argument could be that God may permit evil, but does not necessarily will it, as stated by Thomas Aquinas. We've all been told, though, that staying silent is akin to being complicit in an act, so does that mean God Himself is guilty of perpetuating Evil?

Finally, there's always going to be scepticism, isn't there? There is a premise that maybe the problem of evil, heck, that even evil itself doesn't exist, that it's all an illusion, or that God is actually wholly evil and is making up our reali- no, that's Descartes' thing again, sorry.

So, as I round up this article, I want you to consider this: how much does it really matter to you to believe in (a) God? Have you found a theodicy- proof for the existence of God in the presence of evil- that suits you? Just the possible existence of someone up there (or down below) watching over may be enough for you, and that's okay. At the end of the day, the world isn't always about knowing the facts- sometimes you just need reassurance.

Humans vs. Non-Human Animals- What's the difference?

"There is nothing very distinctive about humans from non-human animals"
A few people would argue that the statement about the similarity between humans and animals, is correct. This argument would be justified for a few reasons. Both humans and animals go through life processes, like reproduction, growth, movement and so on- this is because both human beings and non-human animals are living things. In addition, some animals exhibit more human emotions, like happiness at receiving a treat or jealousy if another animal is paid more attention to than them. Finally, humans have often been saved by animals- an example is when dolphins lead sailors to the shore- in the same way that humans will save some animals. Due to these factors and others, I believe that the statement above is partially correct because while humans and non-human animals may look physically different, they still show similar behaviours to each other.

However, I also believe that most of the similarities between humans and non-human animals end at a biological or primal level. Psychologically, humans and other animals can be vastly different.

For example, humans have been able to develop religions and philosophy to try to explain and understand how the world around them came to be; how to take full advantage of it. This shows clearly that humans have a high intelligence and curiosity level, making them willing to learn about their lives, while non-human animals tend to sus out their environment only to see if they can survive in it.

This high intelligence level also enabled humans to develop a fine-tuned sense of morality- the ability to tell wrong from right and use this sense to help others and develop ourselves.

As a result, we have virtues (qualities considered desirable in a person), and vices- the opposite of virtues- and can learn to lead a more virtuous life. We can transcend our faults and develop our characters to become the best versions of ourselves. Aristotle himself believed this is the purpose of human life. He said, 'Humans are capable of rational thought. The purpose of human life is therefore to use reasoning, and this enables humans to achieve their highest potential.' This concept is known as eudaimonia. Animals simply are not self-aware enough to be able to do this.

Another argument from this point of view is that humans have developed complex language and ways of visual, auditory and written communication. This allows us to not only pass information to one another but also to communicate with people with certain disabilities. For example, we have sign language to communicate with the deaf. In addition, our hundreds of different languages are all woven with their intricacies, making them even more complex. This is what prevents computers (or artificial intelligence) from being able to communicate flawlessly with humans; our languages are far too nuanced to simply KNOW without learning them.

Having said all this, though, we are different from other animals in other respects. Animals will choose the strongest or smartest of their number to lead the group. However, humans with their overly complicated reasoning can be swayed by alliances and false promises. Animals also have small, localised and direct conflicts, which contrasts sharply with human warfare- we kill millions of people with terrible weapons and torture many more with devastating practices. Finally, animals will kill to eat for survival alone while humans would do so just for pleasure. As humans we abuse the resources and other species of the Earth for our selfish means, and coupled with practices like animal testing, often display speciesism. Peter Singer explains, 'While humans are more intelligent..., this is not a justification for mistreating animals.' We dominate over other things and organisms in the absence of morally relevant

differences- speciesism's textbook definition.

In conclusion, I do believe humans are different from other animals in the absence of biological restraints; we have ways of adding meaning to life that amount to more than simply survival- communication, reasoning and language- meaning we aim not to survive but thrive. We are also separate in the unparalleled d destruction and harm we cause to ourselves and other things. Humans truly have the Midas touch- a twisted version where everything turns to ash beneath our fingers.

You're late to Church but remember Jesus' parable that the first will be last and the last will be first.

IS DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR THE WRONG REASON

ALSO THE WRONG THING?
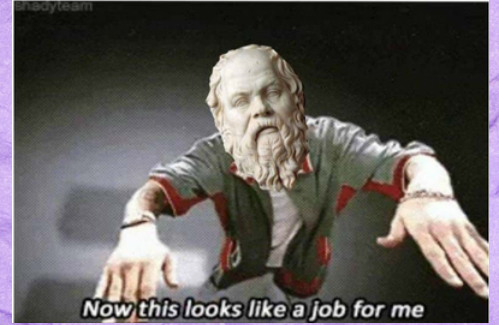
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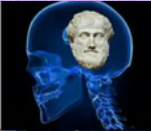
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LET'S GET THIS BREAD

when you hear someone express a belief that can be undermined by a few leading questions

Now this looks like a job for me

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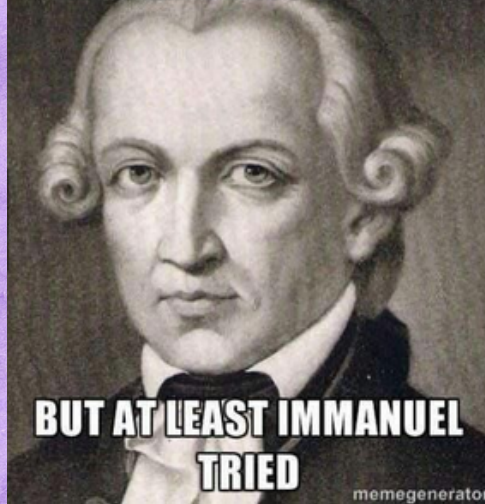
Time is an illusion of the human mind

Time was invented by clock companies to sell more clocks

IMMANUEL KANT

BUT AT LEAST IMMANUEL TRIED

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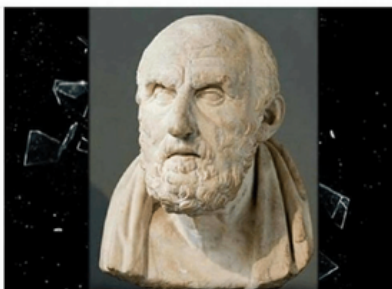
when you say something in philosophy class but then the discussion moves on like nothing happened
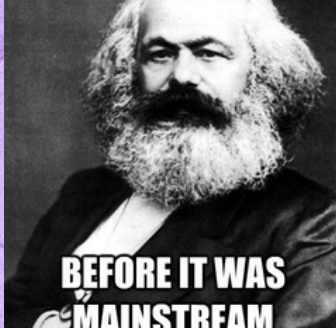
How I wanna die

Chrysippus, an ancient Athenian philosopher, died from laughing at one of his own jokes.

"Haha stop, you're killing me!" - Chrysippus, moments before

WITHOUT OBJECTIVE MORALITY, EVERYTHING IS PERMISSIBLE

BLAMED CAPITALISM

BEFORE IT WAS MAINSTREAM

Philosophy In The News

Epistemic Responsibility- a study in the Coronavirus Crisis

The other day I was mentally reliving the trainwreck of the last two years. What with Covid, recovery from Covid, then Covid wave three, it was a wild ride. Just thinking of everything made my head spin. Like the mask mandate. Restrictions on travel according to vaccination status; staying indoors. It struck me that all these had one thing in common- they curtailed personal freedom in unrivalled ways and relied heavily on individual people's co-operation to succeed. For this reason, the pandemic provides a great opportunity to study epistemic responsibility and I think there's no better way to (finally) close out the tragedy of Covid than reflecting on its effects on our philosophical psyches! Right?

Epistemology is the philosophical study of beliefs. These can be beliefs about anything- not just religion but about us, others, or parts of the world. It's simple, to begin with, but then we spiral into moral and ethical beliefs. And then convictions about premises, and you can probably see how it becomes confusing.

We know or have an idea of what responsibility is. It's something we have more and more of as we get older, and we usually exert it over other people and things that belong to us. As a result, I'd say epistemic responsibility is the duty to consider how our beliefs and convictions affect ourselves and others.

Picture this. A ship owner's ocean liner is in appalling condition, and he knows it. However, he has the misplaced belief that it will survive just one more trip across the sea. Mere hours after it departs, it capsizes, killing all its passengers. Even though the boss was aware of its defects, no one blamed him for the tragedy- he receives insurance and no blame. This thought experiment, devised by William Clifford, asserts that the ship owner must bear moral

responsibility, whether the vessel sunk or not; he was acting on untrue and unfounded beliefs in its seaworthiness. Now, I hear you, 'that's all very well, but why does it matter?' It matters because we all have epistemic responsibility for a few key reasons- we all have beliefs (whether you like it or not), and we all express our opinions in some way, sometimes subconsciously. Our opinions and how we express them can substantially affect others. Political and ethical beliefs can tear family and friends apart, and how we express our opinions also affects those of others.

As a result, we must be careful that we're always basing our actions on well-grounded beliefs that, to the best of our knowledge, are true. Clifford believed that if your beliefs were morally or reason-unfounded (or did others harm), you are morally obliged to cease:
 a) spreading those beliefs and
 b) believing in that yourself.
In short, everyone has the epistemic responsibility to believe things supported by evidence. Clifford posited that having epistemically irresponsible beliefs led you to live a shallow, unexamined life.

So how does this link back to the Covid crisis? A good example to consider here is the mask mandate enforced by most governments. Several groups of people didn't wear masks, including those with respiratory issues, allergies to materials in the masks and even those with phobias of having to cover their faces. However there were those who chose not to wear masks merely because they found them inconvenient. This begs the question, where do we have to draw the line between our right to our personal freedom and the good of the wider society? This is because the very nature of epistemic responsibility often clashes with the notion of personal freedom.

At this point it is important to note that humans seemingly have free will and enjoy fundamental human rights. We also have the "right to offend" as members of society. Because of all of this, in a philosophical context, no one would definitively be wrong to refuse to wear a mask, especially given the importance of personal freedom in our society. However, it can be argued that another important thing in our society is to protect the common interests of everyone in it, through the "social contract".

As part of this contract, we're expected not to kill or harm others, but how, then, do we determine "causing harm"? Because the truth is, albeit unknowingly, people who didn't wear masks may have caused harm to others by becoming carriers or transmitters of the virus. Our personal convictions do matter, but at what point does 'the greater good' eclipse personal convenience? When must we put aside our personal beliefs and become epistemically responsible for the greater good?

Unfortunately, to a certain extent, we don't control what opinions we have. Your political affiliation, beliefs about gender roles, religion, and even perception of yourself were influenced to some extent by your relatives and the environment during your formative years. However, as we grow up and acquire epistemic responsibility, the burden falls on us to ensure that we aren't the metaphorical ship owner in our lives. Because if we don't, who knows how many people will go down on our ship?

Are we really free?

A featured article by Mr A Boutall

In modern political discussion, we are often asked whether or not we are free. 'Freedom' comes in many different shapes and sizes, and it means very different things to different people. For instance, should freedom be viewed through the Marxist socialist prism of freedom 'to do' via economic equality as offered by an omnipotent state that liberates us from the social injustices of our current system, or would this reality deprive us of a more precious freedom 'from' arbitrary intervention, which necessitates a private sphere of action that most of us would associate more with the idea of freedom? Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty' penetrates this question effectively, discussing the rivalrous notions of positive and negative freedom.

However, perhaps too often, we ignore the more central question: do humans actually have a metaphysical capacity for freedom? In any of our actions, could we have chosen differently to the choice we made in reality, or are all our actions and thoughts simply the result of predetermined factors – either fully determined by the velocity of particles and other material forces, as the New Atheists would claim, or by a God who does not allow for free will in our actions, as some Calvinist Predestination theologians assert. Do humans have free will or not? Are we determined by external forces in all our actions, or do we have some self-mastery over what we do? If the latter, in what do we find this capacity? If the former, can we be held truly responsible for anything we do? These questions are central to how we view ourselves and our place in time and space.

Most obviously and importantly, it has traditionally been considered that free will exists in what are regarded as moral, ethical decisions i.e. those where there might be a normative judgement about what is the right or wrong thing to do. In this context, the central precept that 'one might have done otherwise', or Frankfurt's 'Principle of Alternative Possibilities' is what

makes us regard individuals as responsible for their actions according to their free will. If an individual could not have done otherwise than that which they have actually done, then it seems perverse to treat them as blameworthy, or indeed praiseworthy. When we view humans as responsible for their actions – whether they do what they should do or not – we assume some culpability.

For instance, in a court of law, the moral justification given for dispersing punishment against a criminal is that she could have done otherwise. To borrow Leibniz' lexicon, there is a possible world in which the criminal did not commit the crime (that is to say, in all possible worlds, we exist in one where she did commit the crime, but there is another possible one that could have existed in which she did not, thereby meaning the action was not necessary; there is a possibility it would not have occurred).

To use Frankfurt's principle, we hold the criminal responsible since she decided which of the alternative possibilities was chosen, and so had some responsibility in bringing about the reality of the possible world in which she committed the crime; not the one in which she did not. We lay blame with her for choosing one action over another, assuming the alternative possibility that she did not commit the crime could have otherwise been actualised.

From this brief overview of the concept, it is possible to see the central significance such a claim has upon our understanding of human action and upon the awesome essence of responsibility with which we have historically associated it. It is not for no reason that the concept is one which permeates the very first story of humans in the mythologies of the Abrahamic religions, as well as the corresponding justification for the existence of evil and suffering in a world created by an omnipotent, loving God. From a secular standpoint, it also underpins our legal system since, without free will, both the God of Genesis and modern judges seem pernicious. If criminals and the first humans could never have chosen otherwise, and if there were no

alternative possibilities, to punish those who could never have chosen otherwise seems cruel; to blame the blameless is insidious and, as any well-behaved student may know from past experience, intuitively unjust.

Indeed, from a religious or secular standpoint, the modern assumption in some social sciences and physical sciences that we do not possess free will may explain C S Lewis' understanding of modern law as being underpinned by a humanitarian view that 'all crime is pathological', demanding 'not retributive punishment but cure', ultimately leading to a situation in which 'the criminal ceases to be a person, a subject of rights and duties, and becomes merely an object on which society can work'. Without volition and the choice to do otherwise, the idea of criminals having moral responsibility and duties they've broken appears archaic and unjustified. Equally, while it would seem bizarre to hold criminals blameworthy for their actions, it would seem equally strange to praise the actions of the hardworking philanthropist who has alleviated suffering in impoverished communities if she could not have done differently. In a world where no-one really has choice, and where the metaphysical nature of reality does not permit for fundamental self-mastery in human agency, the whole underpinnings of how we view morality – the nature of right and wrong, good and evil, ethical acceptability or not in behaviour – are shaken to the core.

While this article does not have the space to look at potential answers to this problem, it welcomes responses from Newstead scholars who have any answers to discuss! Perhaps, as Hume suggests, I have misunderstood free will and, in reality, free will and determinism are compatible. Perhaps, as Dennett suggests, we are fully determined in our actions and the problems I am discussing are both superfluous and supercilious. Perhaps progress made in quantum mechanics and its apparent incompatibility with the theory of relativity and Newtonian physics undermines the premises of the deterministic New Atheists to such a degree that we have the scope to rediscover a philosophical grounding for this type of metaphysical freedom that grants profundity to human action.

Hedonism in Anguish

I used an online art generator called NightCafe to create this portrait, which I think perfectly represents the stimulus "Hedonism in Anguish." Hedonism, as some people may know, is a philosophical ideology in which one seeks the greatest amount of pleasure for themselves. One of the criticisms of hedonism is that while it results in immediate pleasure for oneself, it may not lead to a lot of long-term good. Using the analogy of the Hedonism Machine, one that allows you to enter a completely immersive reality of pleasure. The question here is, what if your form of hedonism relied on omitting all of (or parts of) the truth? Sometimes, knowing the truth is the best avenue, even if it isn't immediately pleasurable for you. The picture perfectly represents this idea with having all the colours, signifying any and all kinds of pleasure for an individual, while the girl has several distorted faces- one appears to be smiling but the others aren't, because they know that her mindless pursuit of pleasure may eventually lead to her destruction. Of course, none of this answers the question as to the copyrightability of artwork produced by A.I., but I hold my peace.

Spotlight: Angels in Islam

By Tingting Huo in 9G

One reason why angels have no impact on the life of a Muslim is that Muslims believe that they only encounter angels after death, and since they do not worship them everyday like they do Allah, Muslims may not think about Angels. Also, Angels are invisible to humans unless they appear in a human form to them, so Muslims might not think about them. Furthermore, the Angels are devoted to Allah as the Qur'an 16:49-50 says 'They fear their Lord above them and do everything they are ordered to do', so as long as Muslims worship Allah and follow the Qur'an, they will be rewarded. In addition, worshipping any person, prophet, or being other than Allah is considered shirk, the worst of all sins.

This means that Muslims must not revere angels nor look up to them, as they, like man, are creations of God and are only there to worship and serve him.

However, a reason as to why Angels have an impact on the life of a Muslim is because Muslims are aware that the Guardian Angels watch over their every move. This is stated in the Qur'an 13:11 where ti says 'Each person has angels before him and behind, watching over by God's command'. As the Angels report back to Allah, Muslims are cautious of their every move, as they know it could contribute to the Day of Judgement, where Allah decides how people will spend their afterlife – in Heaven or in Hell. The idea of every action leading towards their place in the afterlife encourages Muslims to perform good deeds and actions, whilst taking responsibility even if the outcome turns out to be bad.

Another reason as to why Angels have an impact on Muslims is that they know that they will be rewarded/punished for their actions. As Angels record all actions of everyone and those actions eventually contribute to whether Muslims spend the afterlife in heaven or in hell, many are inclined to do good as they know that they will be rewarded. However, if they perform bad deeds, they will be punished in the afterlife.

This is described in the Qur'an 22:19-22, where it says 'scalding water will be poured over their heads... iron crooks to restrain them'. This description also encourages Muslims to do they know what will happen if they don't follow Allah's word.

In conclusion, I believe that Angels have an impact on Muslims as not only do they watch over people and record all actions of people, but they are also said to control seasons and Mika'il is stated to be able to control natural elements such as wind. If that is so, then Angels certainly have an impact on human actions and how humans live their lives. Although worshipping Angels is forbidden and regarded as shirk, it doesn't mean that Muslims are not allowed to think about their 'prescence'.

Why is this such a good example of an assessment? Well:

- It mentions, explores and explains several points in-depth with reasons given for and against each point.
- In addition to valid points in support of the statement, a few counterpoints and contradictory examples are given to balance out the article.
- There are a lot of relevant quotations given and linked to the point they help to explain, giving the impression of a seamless flow between the action and the reason why.
- The article ends with a conclusion, stating the writer's opinion and justifying this- it's one of the most important parts of your would-be essay.
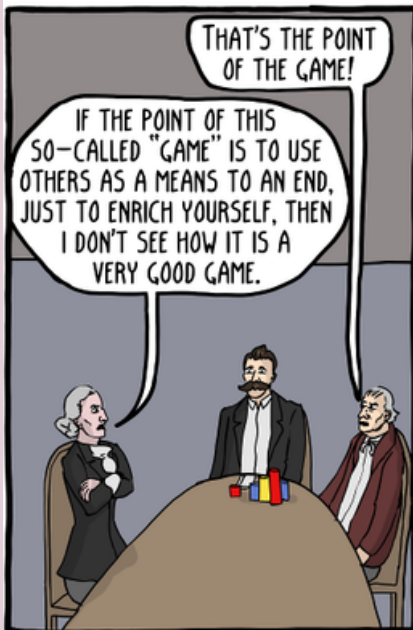
And that's it!

That's the end of this edition's newsletter! Thank you so much for taking the time to read this through, and I hope you enjoyed this compilation of some great work from our contributors. If you're looking to gain further knowledge related to religion, philosophy or ethics, here are some (hopefully!) helpful resources you can use in a variety of formats:

Video/long-form format (all available on YouTube):
- Crash Course Philosophy Series
- PhilosophyTube
- Ted-Ed Religion, Philosophy, Morality and Ethics videos
- The School of Life

Listenable/podcasts (both available on Spotify):
- In Our Time: Philosophy (BBC Radio 4)
- Philosophize This! (Steven West)

Reading material (all accessible in the school library):
- The Pig That Wants To Be Eaten and 99 Other Philosophical Thought Experiments
- 50 Philosophy Ideas You Really Need To Know
- The Philosophy Book: Big Ideas Explained Simply

And here's the AI Art Generator:

NightCafe Creator