

BEING LEFT IN A RIGHT-HANDED WORLD: THEORIZING  
THE POSITION OF THE LEFT HAND IN CONTEMPORARY  
WESTERN SOCIETIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper will argue that 1) historically, various religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and corresponding religious interpretations have contributed to the demonization and de-naturalization of the left hand, and 2) express, due to an epistemological shift from religion to science, how institutional and disciplinary power has shaped the semi-marginalization of the left hand in contemporary Western societies.

## INTRODUCTION

*The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject, a boundary and a limit. A fantasy, if you wish... (Kristeva 1982:154).*

Right/ left, good/evil, and natural/unnatural: these dichotomies reflect a fundamental principle of what Julia Kristeva has described as abjection. By design, abjection can only be surmised when that which is taken for truth is both fractured and permanently displaced by those that previously prescribed to such a truth (Kristeva 1982:84). In writing this essay, it is my hope that I might draw attention to the “nocturnal power” of one such truth (Kristeva 1982:208). First, I will explore, through works produced by Robert Hertz and Mary Douglas, how various pre-modern societies have employed theological representations as a means of establishing and strengthening the position of the right hand(side) as virtuous and divine, and the left hand(side) as deviant and demonic; and second, express the ways that Michel Foucault’s approach to disciplinary power and docile bodies, and Mary Douglas’s approach to the use and deployment of social symbols can be applied to discourses concerning both the marginalization and disempowerment of the left hand in contemporary Western societies.<sup>1</sup>

### FAILING TO LEGITIMIZE THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY THROUGH CLAIMS TO THE ‘NATURAL’ OR DIVINE ORDER: THE RIGHT HAND AS SACRED AND THE LEFT HAND AS PROFANE

*What resemblance more perfect than that between our two hands! And yet what a striking inequality there is (Hertz 1960:89).*

On the surface, very little scholarship has attended to the development of the left hand as a progressive process of stigmatization and demonization across a multiplicity of religions. Instead, such analyses tend to award attention to the ways such social constructions are mediated within the limitations of a particular religion, such as in Johnson’s article concerning the place of the left hand in Islamic funerary practices in Guinea-Bissau (Johnson 2009:102). To avoid reproducing previous accounts for the position of the left hand in

isolated religions, I will trace the history of the socially defined left hand through the overlapping conceptualizations of the left and right hand as evident in three monotheistic religions, and they are as follows: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>2</sup>

To begin, in an effort to both understand and foster a sort of spiritual intimacy with the physical characteristics of ELOHIM certain variations of Middle Eastern Jewish mysticism, such as the Kabbalist movements of the twelfth and fifteenth century, rendered the Divine Creator physically conceivable through the illustration of the ten intangible *sefirot* (Blumenthal 1978:18-19).<sup>3, 4</sup> Each of the sefirot (or vessels), as indicated in the Zohar, contain or emulate a facet of ELOHIM (Blumenthal 1978:16).<sup>5</sup> It is here that I will draw the reader's attention to specifically the fourth and fifth sefirot, Hesed and Gevurah. Hesed, which is also understood as ELOHIM's capacity to love, is generally conveyed as being the anatomical right hand of the Divine Creator. Gevurah, also commonly referred to as Din (fire), is presented as the Creator's left hand and beholder of the "root of evil" (Matt 2009:130). Hesed, the virtuous right hand of ELOHIM, acts as a counterbalance to Gevurah, the penalizing left hand of ELOHIM (Matt 2009:36). This dualistic and yet reciprocal nature between the fourth and fifth sefirot exemplifies certain aspects of Robert Hertz's discussion of symbolic dualism, specifically dualism that occurs between the spheres of the sacred (Hertz 1960:95). However, in this instance, the dualistic nature of the sacred is not contained in a physical or tangible form but in an imagined form. It is not ELOHIM, the divinity, which is initiating the physical fragmentation or separation of the self, instead it is the various rabbinic contributors to the Torah's commentary, which socially separate and divide the Creator's aspects of judgment from those that are considered merciful (Hertz 1960:94). In this manner, those that practiced such mystical traditions of Kabbalah were able to explain how their deity was able to contain the capacity for both great good and evil. As a result, practitioners were able to establish physical practices that would appeal to the loving side of ELOHIM while simultaneously avoiding such actions that would bring about the wrath of the Creator's left hand (Matt 2009:11). One might wonder how those that wrote the commentary to the Torah were able to come to the decision on which of the two hands would represent love (mercy) and judgment (punishment)? This question might be adequately confronted by Mary

Douglas' anthropological work concerning social pollution, and the construction of the social body. In *Natural Symbols*, Douglas entails that it is the social body, or essentially the symbolic rendering of the human body, that constrains the way that the physical body is perceived (Douglas 2003:72). For the rabbinic Kabbalists of the medieval world, this symbolic dualism between the divine's right and left hand represents a social reflection of a Jewish individual's two opposing hands (Douglas 2003:78).

Though specific information concerning the use or disuse of the left hand is devoid from historical sourcebooks pertaining to this particular period, Jewish historians have indicated that during the course of the seventh to the thirteenth century diasporic Jews were often invited to openly engage with members of the Islamic world and more importantly to share meals together (Brenner 2010:69,77; Marcus 1938:13). The ability for practicing Jews to share a meal in the ancient world with a Muslim, and in a Muslim household, indicates a shared sense of rituals concerning the preparative and consumptive practices of food (Brenner 2010:71). In Islam, the left hand is traditionally associated with unhygienic practices, such as masturbation or wiping one's anus was considered socially polluting (Johnson 2009:102). With the exception of funeral practices, the use of the left hand was to be excluded from rituals that were considered sacred, such as the slaughter of livestock or the preparation/consumption of food (Burnside 1991:4). Therefore, to greet a host or to utilize the host's utensils/dinnerware with the left hand would have been considered an insult, or as the application of a curse (Johnson 2009:103). This avoidance of the left hand in sacred practices reveals the intention, "to protect divinity from profanation" (Douglas 2002:9). Consequently, for a Jewish individual to adequately engage with a Muslim host and be invited to participate in Muslim feasts, a luxury not ascribed to Christian *dhimmi*, they would have had to both adhere and employ similar symbolic associations with the left and right hand (Douglas 2003:153). While I am generally not at odds with Douglas' postulations concerning conscious attempts to avoid socially polluting practices, it has recently come to my attention that in the ancient world physical hygienic practices were in no way similar to the common rituals performed in modern restrooms (Robbins 2013:63-64). It is quite possible that the relegation of wiping one's anus with the left hand, and the subsequent avoidance of using said hand during meals,

may have actually begun as a practice grounded in an attempt to limit the spread and contraction of illnesses and diseases found in the natural world (Douglas 2002:36-37). This willful codification of the left and right hand by Judaists and Muslims of the ancient world may have in fact initially come about from necessity, and only later, after the invention of advanced hygienic technologies and the implementation of regular hygienic practices, did the use or disuse of the left hand solely become a matter of social pollution (Lavenda and Schultz 2010:205).

When compared with the Western sects of Christianity, which both openly dichotomize both God/-Satan and the left/-right hand, it is conceivable to consider how previously mentioned Kabbalist views of ELOHIM might compare to the Christian God (Marcus 1938:353). As presented in Matthew, from *Jesus in the Last Testament*, God's son Christ was expected to maintain the constant position of a pastoral shepherd whose primary function was to, "set the sheep on His right hand", which would then be blessed with the entrance into heaven and "the goats on the left", which would then be cast into the "everlasting fire" of hell (Matthew 25:32-41). In many regards, Matthew's social division of the left and right hand of Christ appears to parallel that of the figuratively divided hands of ELOHIM in Kabbalist teachings. Essentially, being placed under the right hand of Christ ensures a person a place in the merciful domain of the all-loving God (white), whereas being placed under the left hand of Christ ensures a person a permanent position in the punishing domain of Satan (red) (Matt 2009:130-131; Matthew 25:35-41).

However, the most important distinction between these two monotheistic representations would be the fact that it is not the hand of God that is portrayed as the bearer of judgment; instead, it is the two hands of Christ, the Son of God. Those that are set under Jesus' left hand are classified as the damned, those that commit symbolically impure or sinister acts, and those that are set under his right hand are those that have adequately shielded the sacred from the polluting forces of the profane (Hertz 1960:96).<sup>6</sup> Why is this prevalent? This shift of judgmental responsibility from the intangible Creator to that of Jesus, who for all intents and purposes is classified as being wrought from flesh and blood, reflects an attempt, which perhaps can be entrenched in various Indo-European religions, to separate the

imagined forces of good from evil (Mallory 1991:130). The early Christian God, who was conveyed by early Gnostic Christians as possessing both the qualities of compassion and chastisement, was later reconstructed through Catholic and Orthodox Christian sects as a deity of social purity and compassion (Douglas 2002:33). While the position of punishment, which was formerly the domain of God, was awarded to Satan, the new bearer of immorality (Marcus 1938:353). Again, I am inclined to ponder on how the position of the left hand in various traditions of Christian theology managed to shift from the indicator of those who are damned to that of a symbolic embodiment for evil? In *Natural Symbols*, Douglas argues that in order to understand the ‘place of evil’ in a society, one must first contextualize how the source of evil is being construed, which in this case is the left hand of the physical body (Douglas 2003:114). I argue that the pre-eminence of the right hand in human populations and a nearly universal failure to achieve organic symmetry was utilized by the right-handed majority to render the right hand as naturally superior to the left hand (Hertz 1960:89). Such claims to ‘the natural’ or divine should be understood as an attempt by one group to socially legitimize the control or disempowerment of another group (Douglas 2003:115-116). This point can be further exemplified by Jewish Historian Michael Brenner, who demonstrated that the legal and social position of a Jew in the eighteenth-century Muslim world relied heavily upon both principled toleration and humiliation (Brenner 2010:71). For example, in the Pact of Umar, as a means of legally demeaning non-Muslims, Jews were expected to walk to the left of a Muslim, a side that represented social impurity and inferiority in Muslim societies (Brenner 2010:275). In a contemporary context, this statement can also be supported by briefly engaging with religious theorist Carol Burnside’s examination of interactions between Iranian Muslim Nationals and representatives of the United States Government following the American/ Iranian conflicts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Burnside, many of her Iranian informants tended to describe American citizens departing from Iran as a “people of the left hand,” a sentiment which Burnside interpreted as a means for Iranian nationals to delegitimize the power previously acquired by the United States government in Iran. (Burnside 1991:4). Yet, Burnside’s research fails to acknowledge a relevant linkage between the prevalence of left-handed occurrences among Presidents of the United States and how her Iranian Muslim respondents viewed left-

handedness as an inherent sign of weakness (Holder 2005).<sup>7</sup> I would argue that for her respondents verbally labelling Americans as a ‘people of the left hand’ may have provided them with an opportunity to use local cultural symbols as a means of undermining the repute of both the United States government and those who so willingly elected left-handers as national leaders.

#### ‘NATURALIZING’ THE LEFT HAND AS SOCIALLY SUBMISSIVE AND THE RIGHT HAND AS SOCIALLY DOMINANT

*[The subjective-symbolic dimension] merely presents the effects and especially the benefits that accrue to the speaking subject from a precise symbolic organization; perhaps it explains what desiring motives are required in order to maintain a given social symbolics (Kristeva 1982:67).*

Though, Foucault suggests there was still a subtle existence of “a religious air,” the nineteenth century for the Western world marks a pivotal shift from the centrality of religion to that of science (Foucault 1995:149; Jaffe 2000:2-3).<sup>8</sup> Geological publications, such as Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*, utilized the scientific approach to stratigraphy, or the complex layering of rocks on the Earth’s surface, to evidently express both the historically progressive and estimated geological age of the Earth’s surface (Brochu et al. 2007:16-17). Geological approaches to science not only undermined both the Christian and Jewish belief that the Earth was crafted by a monotheistic God in seven days, but also that the origin of the planet pre-dated the age established in various holy texts (Darwin 2004: 245-247). Early naturalists—such as Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace—and paleontologists—such as Edward Drinker Cope and O.C. Marsh—produced both physical evidence and theoretical research that supported the theory that all organic beings, including human beings, were continuously undergoing processes of biological evolution and physiological variation as opposed to divine creation (Brochu et al. 2007:22-24; Darwin 2004:251-253).

Thus, it is due to this pivotal shift of social dominance from religion to science that the second half of this paper will explore how concepts in social theory, primarily Michel Foucault’s work concerning

*disciplinary power* and *docile bodies*, and Mary Douglas's work concerning *linguistic coding* and *institutional power*, can be applied to contemporary Western societies as a means of providing transparency for the sometimes opaque processes by which the right hand has been able to continually claim social dominance over the increasingly marginalized left hand.

## SILENTLY FRAMING LEFT-HANDEDNESS AS ABNORMAL AND RIGHT-HANDEDNESS AS NORMAL

As beautifully illustrated by Mary Douglas, who was greatly influenced by the works of Emile Durkheim and Ludwik Fleck, it is essential to comprehend that institutions, as suprapersonal entities, do not think, or embody inherent purposes (Douglas 1986:45,96). Instead, institutions represent the material edifices that are produced by seemingly 'rational' human beings; beings whose primary intent is to either shape the way that members of a particular society subconsciously think collectively—or, with reference to the relevant subject matter, cater to the hand which bears an immense statistical significance (Douglas 1986:1,9). With regards to structural design in contemporary Western societies, it can be argued that Primary, Secondary, and Post-Secondary institutions tend to be conceived by architects and engineers who, perhaps unknowingly, implement designs, such as stairwells (railings), doors (knob-sidedness and orientation), and classroom desks, which tend to favour right-handed comfort and accessibility (Robbins 2013:3) Some might argue that this discrepancy might be due to architects and engineers not being attuned to the left-handed minority's difficulties, or essentially assume, like Irving Stone did for Michelangelo, that right-handedness was naturally universal (Fincher 1993:30). However, social thinkers, such as Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault, might stipulate that this lack of even-handed designs indicates both a systemic, "unwillingness to have a face-to-face confrontation with the abject," and an attempt to implement regulatory controls as a means of producing and governing docile bodies (Foucault 1990:140-141; Kristeva 1982:209). Such designs, which invariably perform a vital role in Western educational settings, act as a physical instrument of behavioural control, which aims to both undermine individual resistance and promote sameness (Douglas 1986:59). Classroom chairs, and correspondingly attached desks, for example, arguably favour the utilization of the socially



dominate right hand in classroom activities, such as writing, while simultaneously causing unnecessary discomfort, due to a lack of an armrest, and subliminally endorse ambidexterity for those that are left-handed (Robbins 2013:2). Even the word ambidextrous, which translates to ‘right-handed on both sides,’ utilizes a linguistic, “ritualization of defilement,” of the left hand to reinforce right-handed social dominance (Fincher 1993:37; Kristeva 1982:70). The endorsement of instruments of control can also be attributed to the promotion and integration of pre-dominantly right-handed materials in academic institutions, such as scantrons (due to the frequency of smudging), binders, scissors, textbooks, and, in fields of study pertaining to medicine, medical technologies (Brydges et al. 2007: 819; Foucault 1995:141). However, it is not merely enough to draw attention to the abjection of the left hand in contemporary Western societies. For even after the shroud of fantasy has been lifted, and the relationship between the left and right hand reconciled, such an attempt to implement accessibility measures can only come to fruition if those that wield power over the left hand willingly confront what he or she has for so long believed to be right, natural and normal (Kristeva 1982:70).

Within the social sciences many of the environmental difficulties previously mentioned have been accounted for, and yet it is in this author’s opinion that most literature fails to frame the difficulties faced by left-handers at home, in academic institutions and in the workplace as more than a matter of inconvenience or minor discomfort. As a left-handed woman who has navigated through a world designed for the right hand, I have had the misfortune of confronting several situations that have proved detrimental to both my mental and physical health. While working as a grader, packer and stacker for a produce production company in rural Essex County both my fellow left-handed coworkers and I were put at a tremendous disadvantage whenever we attempted to complete even simple tasks, such as weighing produce or using industrial shears for clipping the stems of bell peppers. Each of the four assembly lines I consistently worked had been designed to provide the highest degree of convenience for right-handed workers, and as a result, for those of us who were left-handed, we were often required to disband the use of our dominate hands in favour of the right hand. In a workplace setting where speed, efficiency and exceptional hand-eye coordination is crucial; being forced to rely on my right hand

instantly rendered me visible to both my right-handed coworkers and supervisors. When a left-handed worker is injured, which many lefties more so than righties are, or when production grinds to a halt due to a sudden failure to adhere to using the right hand with the same precision as the left hand, we were made aware of our inability to perform equally to that of our right-handed co-workers. As a result, I often found myself unable to feel anything but inadequate and grew accustomed to verbally drawing attention to myself by momentarily acknowledging my left hand as an inconvenience to both my co-workers and my place of employment. Based on my many encounters with other lefties, this necessity to overtly shame one's left hand when it fails to perform a right-handed task seems to be a common experience. For instance, while working as a Graduate Assistant for the University of Windsor, I once encountered a student who had written in the top corner of their final exam an apology for all the smudging on the paper because the student was left-handed. Smudging, namely, the marring of the written word by dragging the palm of the left hand across paper, is a common plight among left-handers who are required by academic institutions to hand-write from left-to-right as opposed to their natural inclination to write from right-to-left. On another occasion, while discussing the topic of left-handedness with a young mother at my place of employment as a grader/produce packer, she told me that her young son was a lefty and that whenever he made a mistake both he and his family members would blame it on his being left-handed regardless of if the behaviour even required the use of his left hand.

In contemporary Western societies, reading and writing from left to right is commonly understood as normal, natural and correct, whereas writing from right to left, as historically exemplified by Leonardo Da Vinci, is considered abnormal, unnatural, and quite frankly 'backwards' (Gelb 2004:55; Lombroso 1903:441). This intentional division between what individuals and corresponding social behaviours are considered normative, and which are considered deviant in a sense mirrors Michel Foucault's studies concerning the objectification of a human subject in relation to another (Foucault 2003:126-127). The right-handed majority utilizes processes of power, such as claims to normalcy, to legitimize labelling members of the numerical left-handed minority as indicators of perversion and abnormality (Foucault 1990:141,144). Such a claim can be

strengthened by reviewing the controversial works of renowned physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who, upon reviewing the research of Camerano, Livingstone, and Rollet, prematurely drew the conclusion that among human beings left-handedness represented an indication of an uncivilized mind, while right-handedness represented a natural indication of a progressive or cultured mind (Lombroso 1905:440-441).<sup>9</sup> In an effort to proliferate the budding disciplines of neuropsychology and psychiatry, Lombroso argued that left-handedness, due to its association with the right side of the brain, acted as a precursor for savagery and lunacy (Foucault 2003:214; Lombroso 1905:442-443).<sup>10</sup> Lombroso's blatant medicalization of the left hand further sustained the belief that the presence of the left-handed individual in Western societies of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century amounted to little more than a present encroachment on humankind's natural, "advances in both civilization and culture" (Foucault 2003: 126-127; Lombroso 1905:442). An encroachment that could only be managed or diffused by either furthering the production and dissemination of research concerning the problem of the left hand, such as the widespread distribution of J.W Conway's educational pamphlet *The Prevention and Correction of Left-handedness in Children* in America, or by the implementation of medical regimens suited to 'curing' left-handedness (Conway 1936; Foucault 2003:137-138).

## MARGINALIZING THE LEFT HAND AND LEFT-HANDEDNESS THROUGH DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Foucault never alluded to the central role of codifying the left and right hands in Western societies. However, his work concerning how the creation of functional sites and punishment are used to render the human body and mind docile can certainly be applied to my analysis of how judgment of the left hand has become normalized (Foucault 1978:143, 177). To appreciate how central disciplinary power is to the formation of docile bodies, I will refer to a fictitious scenario from Guillermo Del Toro's Mexican/Spanish film *Pan's Labyrinth*. Near the beginning of the film Ofelia, the young female protagonist and her mother are moving to an isolated military fort, and upon their arrival, Ofelia was greeted by her new stepfather, who was dressed in a fashion accustomed to a high-ranking military officer (Del Toro 2006). Being both nervous and intimidated by this strange man, she unknowingly

offers him her left hand, to which he grasps tightly and whispers to her that she is using the wrong hand (Del Toro 2006).

This scenario, which was intentionally implemented by del Toro, reveals to the audience that Ofelia's stepfather, due to the disciplinary powers previously exercised by his superiors during military training, has acquired a preconceived notion of what social behaviours are considered characteristics of an almost universal, "bodily rhetoric of honour" (Foucault 1995:135). This displacement of the left hand informal military greetings reflects both the gradual and complex disciplinary processes by which an ideal homogenous military identity is made, and how it is able to be reinforced by those who 'automatically' adhere to such an identity (Foucault 1995:136). Yet as indicated by the previous inclusion of my own personal experiences, efforts to exercise political anatomy, or the rendering of the human body under the influences of increased external domination and self-aptitude, in the Western world, should not be regarded as characteristics exclusive to military doctrine (Foucault 1995:138). Instead, the deployment and distribution of political anatomy can be observed in a multiplicity of doctrines, such as in education, medicine and production (Foucault 1995:141,143). Multiple studies, and to a greater extent self-reports, have indicated that in educational settings, individuals who maintained positions of power, such as mentors, teachers, and professors, have implemented coercions that act upon left-handed students (Goldman et al. 1975:369). However, when methods of coercion, such as a teacher manually switching a pencil from a student's left to right hand, fail to produce a 'docile' body sometimes violent methods of punishment, such as the slapping of the left hand with a ruler<sup>11</sup>, were applied (Fincher 1993:17-18, 23, 152). Coercion and punishment should not be regarded exclusively to the individual beliefs and preferences of teachers. While conducting research surveys in the 1930s on the prevalence of left-handedness in American primary schools, C.A. Selzer noted that it became necessary to state whether or not a school district reported incidences of discouraging writing with the left hand (Goldman et al. 1975:369). Perhaps even more startling would be the four-year campaign by various schools in Elizabeth, New Jersey, to 'cure' individuals of their left-handedness (Garrison 1938:328-329). As a result, 184 out of the 250 left-handed students were wrongfully forced to become right-handed (1938:328).

The scenario mentioned from the film *Pan's Labyrinth* can also provide my readership with an example of how Ofelia's stepfather, a victorious man of enormous power and authority, attempts to both draw attention to her behaviour, which is considered inappropriate, and implement verbal corrections to the social operation of her body (Del Toro 2006; Foucault 1995:173). Ofelia's stepfather's verbal response represents a restricted linguistic code. Or that essentially, his utterance conveys pertinent information while simultaneously reflecting and reinforcing the dominant social structure (Douglas 2003:25). In this instance, and perhaps in a semi-universal way, it is the use of the left-hand that is subjected to verbal humiliation by the numerically legitimized right-handed majority. Coincidentally, the prevalence of restricted linguistic codes, like Foucault's approach to political anatomy, can be observed within the realm of an American military doctrine. Jack Fincher, who in his youth would have been considered left-handed, notes that left-handed members of the American military were regularly verbally humiliated for saluting or taking oaths with the left hand (Fincher 1993:25). The use of verbal humiliation and attempts to initiate the correction of behaviours wrought by the left hand can often exceed the confines of a military sphere. Similarly to the fictional heroine from Del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, I have found myself put in situations, especially where shaking, eating, writing or working with my left hand is concerned, where the automatic application of my left hand has sparked disdain in those who choose to render my so-called indecency visible (Del Toro 2006).

I would strongly contend that this construction of the right hand (side) as being naturally superior to the left hand (side), and thus the semi-marginalization of the left hand based on a disparity of statistics, should be viewed as a hollow monument or perhaps even more appropriately as, "an empty castle," one that on the outside seems sound but when approached with an anthropologist's hammer is nothing more than an empty shell, a social construction fabricated by the human mind (Kristeva 1982:49).

## CONCLUSION

Though historically Western societies have tended to endorse right-handed environmental accessibility, I would argue that the left hand,

and those that primarily use it, should not be framed as being without the ability to exercise agency (Garrison 1938:325-326). In the contemporary Western world, there exists a multiplicity of means of non-violent resistance that can, and on a daily basis are, enacted by left-handed individuals. Negative religious associations attributed to the left hand have extensively dissipated, and although many of the institutional and architectural constraints remain in all levels of education, left-handed students are less likely to be disciplined by academic authorities for writing/ working with the left hand or requesting a pair of left-handed scissors (Goldman et al. 1975: 369). This positive shift in the degree to which the left hand has been managed in contemporary Western societies has arguably enabled space for lefties to both perceive and publicly engage their left hand in ways that may not have been conceivable in previous decades.

From a global market perspective, the left-handed individual offers a previously unexplored market niche. As a result, a small but specialized market, which caters to the comfort and accessibility of the left-handed user, has managed to emerge. Now more than ever, left-handed consumers are able to purchase reversely-strung guitars, can-openers, cups, rulers, chequebooks, and perhaps most prominently of all medical and professional equipment (Brydges et al. 2007:819; Fincher 1993:24-25). Within the last 100 years, associations, such as the *National League for Left-handers* and the *Association for the Protection of the Rights of Left-Handers*, have been formed and, in effect, provide a small space of social resistance (Fincher 1993:21, 25).

Conversely, there now exist claims, through the ‘application’ of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, that being left-handed biologically offers an intellectual advantage over those that are primarily right-handed (Denny and O’Sullivan 2007:357). However, I feel that it is my duty to establish that such claims to intelligence are essentialist at best. The cause for my disapproval being that such a definition expresses that only a fixed set of criteria characterize a human being as intelligent. At last, I would like to conclude by stating that I truly do believe that even in a world where the two human hands have failed to be evenly regarded that there exists—and can continue to exist—opportunities which can provide accessibility and social equality for those that favour the left hand.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I feel it is important to establish that though the primary focus of this essay was to address the marginalization of the left hand, that I am both sensitive to and aware of the existence of instances where the right hand, and incidentally a right-handed person, can be disadvantaged in a cultural environment.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that when I am referring to *history*, I am refraining from such definitions that would limit processes of social evolution to that of teleology.

<sup>3</sup> In the Jewish tradition, it is perceived as inappropriate to speak or write the true name of their deity, as per they believed that it was ignorant to assume that they could be on a first-name basis with Him. As a means of avoiding this, Judaists began using the capitalized word ELOHIM or YHVH instead (Matt 2009: 130, 132).

<sup>4</sup> During the late twelfth century, an emerging form of Jewish mysticism, known thereafter as Kabbalah, took hold of Spanish Rabbinic teachings. Kabbalists preached that not only did ELOHIM dwelt in every aspect of both the physical and metaphysical world, but that the creator needed ‘His’ creations just as much as they needed ‘Him.’ The Zohar, the Kabbalist commentary to the Torah, was one of the first religious texts to render the various facets of ELOHIM in a tangible form that was neither entirely male nor female, but instead of an equal balance between the two (Matt 2009: 21-23).

<sup>5</sup> The Zohar is a collection of volumes written in Aramaic, which forms the foundational canon of Kabbalist Jewish mysticism. The Zohar is also regarded as a commentary to the mystical elements of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible (Giller, 2001:4-5).

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, the word for ‘left’ during the late classical Roman period was ‘sinister.’

<sup>7</sup> Relevant United States Presidents who publicly favoured the left hand: Gerald Ford (38th President), Ronald Reagan (40th President), George H.W. Bush (41st President), and Bill Clinton (42nd President) (Holder, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Such as the continued practice of placing one’s left hand over a holy text, while simultaneously raising one’s right hand during the initiation of a *Sworn Testimony* in North American Courts (1977:1687-1688).

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<sup>9</sup> Camerano, Livingstone, and Rollet each published research pertaining to the prevalence of left-handedness among populations of non-human animals, such as parrots, lions, and anthropomorphous monkeys.

<sup>10</sup> Which Lombroso considered to act as merely a support to the left-side of the brain, and thus the lesser of the two.

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First and foremost, I am certain that had it not been for his premature death, which was brought about by the events of World War I, that early French Sociologist Robert Hertz would have continued to develop and publish his thoughts on the position of the two human hands in modern societies. Therefore, I openly acknowledge that this paper, which has taken up nearly three years of my academic career, was my attempt to both pay homage to and pick up where Hertz left off.

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