



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network

THE COMICS GRID
Journal of comics scholarship

Research

How to Cite: Hornsby, I. 2019. ...Comic Books, Möbius Strips, Philosophy and.... *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, 9(1): 7, pp. 1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.151>

Published: 04 April 2019

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2019 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Third-party content is included in articles for research and educational purposes only under Academic Fair Dealing/Fair Use. Unless otherwise stated all third-party content is copyright its original owners; all images of and references to characters and comic art presented on this site are ©, ® or ™ their respective owners.

Open Access:

The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

RESEARCH

...Comic Books, Möbius Strips, Philosophy and...

Ian Hornsby

University of Chichester, UK

i.hornsby@chi.ac.uk

This article examines three comic books, *Silver Surfer #11* (Marvel Comics), *Omega Men #9* (DC Comics) and *Promethea #12* (Americas Best Comics), as philosophy in themselves, and not merely as supplements to philosophical texts or as a convenient form through which the complex ideas of philosophy can be elucidated. Each of these three issues utilises the form of the Möbius Strip in their fabrication in a variety of ways that contend with concepts of the One and the Infinite. Within their construction, these comics challenge ways of reading that are exclusive to the form of the comic book medium and enable a distinctive method for exploring themes of the good life, truth, and creativity. The article then returns full circle once again to further interrogate the manner in which each of these three comic books engages with the four choices we are faced with in our understanding of the One and the Infinite.

Keywords: Infinity; Silver Surfer; Promethea; Omega Men; Möbius Strip; Philosophy

Setting the Scene

John Barth's FRAME-TALE, which opens his 1966 collection of short stories, *Lost in the Funhouse*, takes the form of a Möbius Strip that loops infinitely to create both the longest and shortest story ever written. This FRAME-TALE invites the reader to cut along the dotted line on the right-hand side of the page to produce a thin strip of paper with the words: 'ONCE UPON A TIME THERE' on one side, and 'WAS A STORY THAT BEGAN' on the other. We are then asked to twist the loose ends of the strip and fasten them together to form an endless tale in the form of a Möbius strip.

Barth's FRAME-TALE is an example of 'literature as philosophy' and not simply literature used to elucidate philosophical concepts. Other artists such as American

sculptor John Ernest (1922–1994) and Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher (1898–1972) have also used August Ferdinand Möbius's discovery of a non-orientable, two-dimensional surface, transformed into an infinite single surface in three-dimensional Euclidean space, to create works of art that are in themselves philosophical questions concerning time, space, perception and illusion. It is the use of the Möbius strip as a representation of the infinite that I would like to explore in three comic books, *Silver Surfer* #11, *Omega Men* #9 and *Promethea* #12, each of which are texts that offer up a set of conditions from which philosophical discussions on the One and the Infinite can emerge.

Comics as Philosophy

This research will explore the idea that comic books are Philosophy. In other words, not simply seeing them as supplements to philosophical ideas, or as a convenient and accessible form by which to elucidate difficult philosophical concepts; but rather, to see comic books as philosophy in themselves, as texts that offer up the possibility for philosophy. I want to suggest that our engagement with comic books during their short history has brought about a measurable shift in our interpretation of time, space, text, image, and composition, as a combined intensity. In this sense, I'm suggesting that the comic book form runs parallel to the leap that has taken place in our understanding of the world since the early years of the 20th century, which has shifted paradigmatically from a Newtonian worldview to one of Quantum Physics. This is similar to the shift that took place during the Renaissance as new approaches to painting were adopted that ran parallel to the scientific discoveries in linear perspective, motion, and mathematics, that we associate with the leap made in science from Aristotle and Euclid to that of Copernicus and Galileo. This paper is not a history of comics that maps the development of this process through the 20th and 21st century, although I would invite and encourage historians of comics to undertake this research. Nor is this paper an examination of comic books which set out to elucidate complex scientific and philosophical ideas via the medium of sequential art, such as Thibault Damour's *Mysteries of the Quantum Universe* (2016) or Nick Sousanis's *Unflattening* (2015). However, it does examine the form of three

contemporary comic books that are a part of popular culture and which engage with the continuing tradition of the myths and folklore of heroes and heroines. Although I don't have space to fully explore and explain all of these complex points in this article, I will, at the very least, attempt to lay the groundwork for future writing and research. Therefore, contrary to approaches that engage with comic books as complements to philosophy, I have set out to examine the manner in which comic books develop both epistemological questions concerning our knowledge of the world, and ontological questions concerning the nature of existence, and most especially how these can be seen in the form of the popular genres of comics that are bought each and every Wednesday.

In this paper, I want to look briefly at three connected areas of philosophy that *Silver Surfer #11*, *Omega Men #9* and *Promethea #12* address in their own unique ways. The first is Eudaimonia, the Greek term for human flourishing. This is a term that Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* sees as a way of 'identifying a manner of living well' (2001: 1095a), and what his predecessor, Plato, speaking through the character of Socrates, writes of in the *Apology* and the *Republic*, as the form of the Good and Justice that is essential to living a good life and being true to one's own soul and not merely to the representations of truth and justice in the way one is perceived by others. This question concerning 'the good life', suggests that there must be 'the bad life', an inauthentic manner of living which is not best for either oneself or others. This binary opposition brings into play the second philosophical idea that each of these three comic books addresses, namely, the concept of truth. How to define, understand, and set some kind of foundation upon which to understand what is best and what is a good life. Does this truth need to be singular, and as such, point to the idea of the One? Or can there be multiple truths, which would point to the concept of the Infinite? Both of these previous philosophical questions lead in turn to the third and final question that I want to explore here, and this question is concerned with the nature of creativity, the idea of the new, or novelty. How does anything new come into existence? Can something come from nothing, *creation ex nihilo*? If not, then we are forever in a determined world where everything is derivative and

where nothing new can ever grace our existence. But if the new can come into the world, where does it come from? Is it from outside the limits of our understanding, transcendental as it were, as if from God; or does it emerge immanently, unfolding from inside the world in a manner never perceived of before?

Each of these three comic books opens up the possibility of exploring these questions in how they address the concept of finitude and infinity through the different manifestations of the Möbius strip that they employ.

Silver Surfer

Marvel Comics *Silver Surfer #11, Never After*, from June 2015, created by Michael Allred, Dan Slott, and Laura Allred, is a fine example of a comic book that utilises many of the unique aspects of comic book form in its fabrication. Not only does it explicitly use the form of a Möbius Strip in the telling of its tale (2015; **Figure 1**), but it also uses this device to challenge our methods of reading and understanding through the elements that make up the issue, from its elongated panels, distorted images, chevron style gutters that lead the eye around the page, fascinating perspective angles, split page orientations, and in its use of flat primary colours to build its world. Therefore, in order for us to fully engage with reading the story in this issue, we have to change the manner in which we usually read comic books. From page 2 of the issue, we have to follow only the top half of the story until we reach page 12 when the panels sweep downwards into the bottom half of the page where we read until page 23, still several pages from the end of the issue. At this point, our eyes must sweep upwards once again, and this time move around the page by turning the book over in our hands so that we can follow the narrative back towards the beginning of the issue once more.

It is only on further readings of this infinite Möbius Strip story that as readers we can become the character of the Silver Surfer ourselves and actively choose to hear the words of the 'Never Queen', who is the embodiment of all possibilities and who exists in 'the space outside of time, and the time outside of space' (Slot, Allred 2015: 1). On hearing her advice, we can exert our free will and step off the infinity

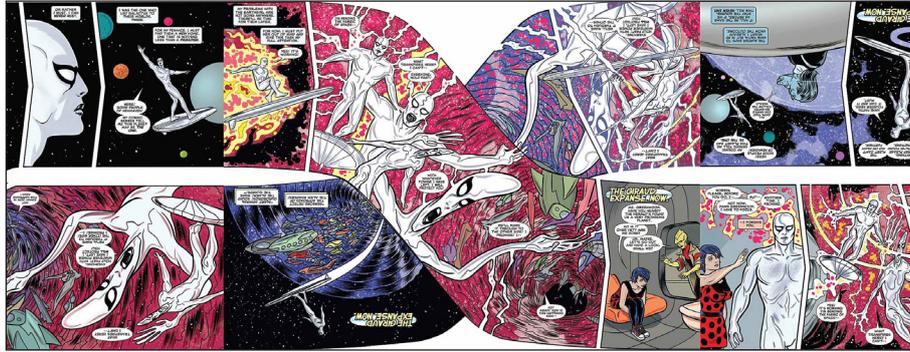


Figure 1: *Silver Surfer* #11, Dan Slott, Michael Allred, and Laura Allred. ©Marvel Worldwide, Inc., 2015.

strip and 'be the one who turns the page in the story of our life' (23). But free will, as we find out, has consequences and endless possibilities even beyond the closing of this folktale.

Unlike Barth's use of the Möbius Strip in *Lost in the Funhouse*, Slott and the Allred's example does more than simply draw attention to the dilemma of a double coded postmodern existence of being lost in the ironic hall of mirrors in an And/Both universe. Allred and Slott's science fiction folk tale draws our attention to the connection between the Möbius strip world, on which both the Surfer and Dawn Greenwood are infinitely trapped, and our own neoliberal postmodern times in which all too often we are made to believe that the world is without possibilities, without future, and where time has collapsed in upon itself to breaking point where morals are without purpose and where truth has become an ironic fallacy. Slott and Allred's tale in *Silver Surfer* #11, is full of positive possibilities in the way it addresses the material existence of the subaltern classes, whom the Surfer is trying to save with his *power cosmic*. This fairy tale embodies Marx's materialist suggestion in the *XI Thesis on Feuerbach*, in which 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.' (1998: 574) A close reading of this story illustrates how both the words and visuals combine to break the infinite loop of ignorance and to tell four individual, yet connected stories, each of which addresses the possibility of something new coming into existence, of the belief in truth, and

of seeking possible ways in which to live a good life. However, the manner in which Slot and Allred offer up the possibility of escape for Dawn and the Surfer from the infinite loop of the Möbius Strip is unfortunately in the form of a *Deus ex Machina* and has very little rationality to it. The fact that this story is about an alien surfer who travels intergalactically on a surfboard and uses '*the power cosmic*' to enable an earth woman to breath while travelling through the cosmos at the speed of light, is clearly irrational, but this aspect of the story is, to quote from the final lines from section §24 of Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'a likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility.' (2001: 1482) The impossibility of the character of the Silver Surfer is fine in fiction, it triggers our imagination, but the invention of the Never Queen to aid their leap from the infinite loop is an unconvincing improbability and a contrived device all too convenient in removing us from the 'corners' we paint ourselves into. In order to deepen our understanding of the possibilities that are contained in this issue of Silver Surfer it will be useful to take a short detour into...

...Infinity and Beyond

In the history of Western thought, there have been three major paradigm shifts in our understanding of the relationship between the One and the Infinite. During the period of classical antiquity, Being as such, was seen as finite in a cosmos that was limited. The Greek Gods themselves were immortal but they were always finite beings in terms of the possibilities of their existence. The Greek term Apeiron (ἄπειρον) indicates that which is unlimited, or infinite, and this was seen as a frightening thing in the ancient world. The idea that there was an infinite world of possibilities was a terrifying prospect and would bring about a cosmos in which nothing could have certainty. The very act of attempting to go beyond the limits of existence was for the ancient Greeks and Romans a form of hubris and as such would bring about tragic consequences. This can be seen in Greek tragic drama in which any act that attempts to go beyond the limit of the finite world would inevitably lead to death and destruction on a grand scale as can be seen in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. In the Greek view of the cosmos there was a tension between, Being as such, i.e. the finite world, in which there are harmony and perfection in the finite

existence of the One; and on the other hand, the imperfections of unlimited infinite possibilities which could only ever lead to chaos and uncertainty.

The second succession of the tension between the One and the Infinite in the west took place during the middle ages and up to the late Renaissance with the rise of monotheism and most especially Christianity. This period sees the idea emerge of a God who has no limit, and who is beyond the limits of our finite world itself. This omnipotent God is infinite but also takes the form of the One. In this view of the cosmos, there are two parallel realms of possibilities, there is the realm of finite possibilities, which is the realm of humans; and there is also the realm of infinite possibilities which is the realm of the one One, i.e. God. During this period the infinite is the cause of creativity. It is from God that something comes from nothing into the realm of the finite. Whereas in ancient Greek times it was a form of hubris leading to tragedy to believe in something beyond the limits of existence, in the period of Christianity it is a tragedy not to believe in that which exists beyond the world of the finite. To believe in God was to believe in a truth greater than oneself and to make a leap of faith towards the infinite Being beyond the limits of one's finite existence.

The third succession which is best understood as a period of Romanticism, which takes us right up to the present day and includes modernism and postmodernism because very little in terms of radical change have taken place since the 18th century. What we have seen over this period of time is a deepening of the economics of capitalism and a spread of the neoliberal politics that support this mode of economic existence. The increase in the belief and values of individuality, and a vast increase in ironic attitudes towards truth, equality, and material change for many of the world's poorer peoples. In this twilight period for God, the world itself is infinite and the One is separated from the infinite with the proverbial 'death of God'. Without the mediating figure of Christ, the Romantic age creates a philosophical framework to find the One through science. In this way it is the human herself who can have access to the infinite, that which is beyond the finite world is available to us via our own creativity. Man has indeed become the measure of all things but in so doing begins to lose faith in the possibility of finding any form of truth either finite or infinite.

Four Choices

In relation to these brief thoughts about the changes in our understanding of the relationship between the One and the Infinite in the past 2,500 years, or so, of the Western history of ideas, we are faced with four choices:

1. We can renew the relationship between the One and the Infinite: Find a new faith and propose a new definition of God or simply return to the old view of God.
2. If we have no faith in God but want to retain a relationship between the One and the Infinite, then we have to propose a new definition of life, creativity, or nature, a new conception of the becoming of pure immanent action but without any access to notions of transcendence.
3. We can suppress or destroy the relationship between the One and the Infinite but attempt to keep some kind of faith in existence as something divine but finite and powerless. Here we must propose a new pagan religion without transcendent power, something like an image of perfection inside the world.
4. Or we can try to propose a form of being inside a pure multiplicity without either transcendent or immanent references to the One as such. A decoupling of the infinite from the One and return it to multiple being. The Infinite as no longer transcendent but mundane.

In regard to these points, I suggest that a closer reading of Silver Surfer #11 reveals that the choices made by Slott and the Allred's' in this story are quite reactionary in that they return us to a form of the Christian era of the relationship between the One and the Infinite. In a strong sense they suggest a return to the relationship between the One and the Infinite but with a new concept of God in the figure of the Never Queen. A new image of God who offers a faith in faithlessness, i.e. a reactionary subject position that creates something new but in the same clothing as the old. Something beyond the world that can save us from the disasters of this world but not something we can actually find truth in, other than by taking our free will

in our hands and making a blind leap of faith into a faithless future. This is the first of the choices presented above in regard to the choices we can take in relation to the infinite and the One. We can renew the relationship between the One and the Infinite: Find a new faith and propose a new definition of God. However, is this choice merely a reactionary one. Not a pure return to the past but one that creates something new from that which already exists, as a way of conserving older ideas. A new vision of God i.e. the Never Queen, or even ourselves as God in the form of the Surfer, where we must grasp our free will and make either a faithful or faithless leap. Either way, this choice still leaves the old forms of the system very much in place.

Omega Men

The second comic book I've chosen to analyse is DC Comics, *Omega Men #9, Peace for Vega*, which is part of a 12-issue maxi-series, that came out monthly between August 2015 and July 2016. The book is a testament to the extraordinary creative partnership between writer Tom King, artist Barnaby Bagenda, and colourist Romulo Fajardo Jr. This challenging, yet remarkable book, that was almost cancelled mid-run by DC comics, only to be saved by a huge outcry from its loyal readership, is a story that presents the apparent opposing forces of good and evil, life and death, beginnings and endings, as a treatise on the terrifying consequences of power in all its many forms, as these oppositions are drawn together on to a single infinitely recurring path of futility and war.

The stories main protagonists are the guerrilla 'terrorist' group known as the Omega Men, who worship, unsurprisingly, a god of endings and destruction. While their enemy, the Citadel, a tyrannical empire responsible for planet-wide genocide, worship Alpha, the beginning, the thing that is without cause but brings about all causes. In the middle of this endless battle we find Kyle Rainer, the hero, the now depowered Green/White Lantern, whose role it is in the story to find a third way beyond the 'brightest day and darkest night and find the light of truth' between the two warring factions and to bring about reconciliation and peace. However, like all good works of art, this story does not follow the path that the reader might have initially expected it to take.

Issue #9 opens with a nine-panel grid, as each of the 12 issues in this series does. This format focuses the reader's attention onto the characters, the plot, and the narrative because of the limited amount of panel space which restricts the level of background detail and focuses the eye on the limited detail in the panel. This narrative device works best when every now and again it is broken to make an impact upon the reader with a single image over a double page spread to overwhelm us. However, unlike the previous issues of *Omega Men* that are made up predominantly of nine-panel grids, *Peace for Vega* reorders the collective elements of the comic book and plays with the form's immanent tensions. As each page advances through the story, the number of panels decreases by one, from nine to eight to seven down to one. Then we have a double page spread of an exploding planet and begin to move on up once more from a single page panel to two panels, and then three, all the way back up to nine to finish the book.

This formulaic device is fascinating in terms of how the reader interacts with the words and images in the panels which increase in detail the larger the panels become. In this episode of the series Kyle Rayner, believes that he can bring about peace between the genocidal Citadel of The Alpha Empire, and the guerrilla group of Omega Men who commit 'terrorist' acts for 'good' reasons. Rayner believes that if he can expose the billions of murders committed by the Alphas to the general public, he will be able to find a third way, he will be able to take down the leaders of the Empire and make the terrorist actions of the Omega Men defunct. He fails miserably, and his position is shown to mirror the corrupt politician Ambassador Xznn, whose rhetoric is equally as self-aggrandizing as Rayner's own. What this Möbius strip comic book presents through a clever use of colour, seen most explicitly in the final page of issue #9, is not a direct answer to the complex political problems that mirror those of American Interventionism in the middle east and its resulting and continuing chaos, but an insight into human psychology that is inspired by King's reading of William James whose quotations appear in the final panel of each issue. The manner in which each character in the story has the potential for greed, fear, rage, love, compassion, hope, free-will, as well as good and evil, is represented in the

colours of orange, yellow, red, pink, indigo, blue, green, through to black and white (2015; **Figure 2**), which are presented in the visual images of the comic book panels as a powerful but less direct counterpoint to the words that we read. This device is also used in the comic to draw attention to the difference between what people say they believe and how these beliefs go on to inform the ways in which characters act.



Figure 2: *The Omega Men #9, Peace for Vega*, Tom King, Barnaby Bagenda, and Romulo Fajardo Jr., © DC Comics a Warner Bros. Entertainment Company, 2015.

In terms of the four choices we are faced with in our understanding of the relationship between the One and the Infinite, King, Bagenda, and Fajardo Jr's *Omega Men* does not choose simply a return to ideas from Antiquity, or the position of re-establishing or reinventing Christianity, as Silver Surfer #11 does, but rather makes a choice towards addressing the issue of the endless futility of war by questioning the way in which we act out rituals of faith even as we remain faithless. This can be seen in the many occasions when characters in the book pray or recite words of religious ritual while performing in exactly the opposite manner; as if in the words of William James used by King to close *Omega Men* issue #2, 'we pray because we cannot help praying'. In this sense, this book presents a desire to retain a relationship between the One and the Infinite, even though any faith in this relationship has long since passed. The consequences of this are that a new definition of creativity, of nature, a new conception of life must be sort amid the complete lack of faith in any transcendent resolution to this problem. The major problem with this choice is that the destruction of transcendence for a purely immanent position is blind and nihilistic. The new names for the mediator and initiator of the new and creativity from nothing such as life, creativity itself, nature etc. are all without truth when they have no foundations because there is no basis on which to find and position this new truth. Without the concept of truth, these names become indifferent to humanity and suffering and as such are more problematic that we might think. And *Omega Men* bears this out strikingly with the violence and lack of a moral position and truth that can be seen in issue #10 with panel after panel and page after page of bloodshed, fighting, and war without end. I won't spoil the final issues, but instead let you read for yourself and make your own decision about the ways in which art and life, us and them, action and salvation are brought to a fascinating conclusion in this quite brilliant comic book.

Promethea

The third and final comic I want to analyse is J.H. Williams III, Alan Moore, Mick Gray, and Jeromy Cox's, issue #12 of *Promethea* (1999–2005), from their 32-issue run for America's Best Comics. Issue #12, *The Magic Theatre*, is where this title begins to

find its own distinctive rhythm and voice in terms of departing from its re-imagining of the Wonder Woman superheroine archetype, in terms of Egyptian rather than Greek mythology, towards a title that explores the close relationship between magic, philosophy and story-telling. Issue #12 takes the comic book superhero genre in a unique direction by adopting Aleister Crowley's definition of Magick as 'the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with the Will...via the "Magical weapons," of pen, ink, and paper' (Crowley, 2004: 126), into the realm of comic book creation. This issue is a work of Magick in itself and across its twelve double-page spreads (2001; **Figure 3**), this remarkable book re-imagines the primary tarot cards in relation to art, science, politics, and love, through the rhyming couplets of two snakes, Mack and Mike; explores Nietzsche's ideas of the eternal return; retells a history of the cosmos as it relates to earth; discloses an anecdotal joke from Alister Crowley, concerning magic and an imaginary mongoose; and uses the Möbius Strip form as a 'Flick-book' in which a devil and an angel move up and down the page as we flick through its pages.

There are many fascinating aspects to this issue, one of the most striking is the manner in which the use of beautifully rendered double page spreads challenges our modes of reading and how a comic book story can be told. Our eyes are invited to find new ways of seeing and reading as they move around the page. The storytelling art and writing in this book is not so much Sequential Art but the comic book art as a constellation.

Walter Benjamin in his Prologue to *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* suggests that ideas are related to objects in a similar manner to the ways in which stars relate to their constellations. Within these musings, Benjamin is proposing that ideas are not real in themselves any more than the 88 constellations in the night sky, defined by the International Astronomical Union, are real in themselves. However, like constellations, ideas enable us to more easily make and perceive relations between objects in the world and in this sense, they are not merely subjective, and they have real-world consequences in our everyday reality such as helping us with navigation. But even with this said constellations are fictional constructions deeply connected to



Figure 3: Promethea #9, Alan Moore, J.H. Williams III, Mick Gray, Jeromy Cox, © Americas best Comics, 2001.

myth and ledged and as such are both objective and subjective in nature. This duality is also a part of J. H. Williams III page designs and the manner in which he connects the various aspects of the issue, including Sophie Bangs narrative as Promethea, the factual information about the Major Arcana that Sophie is learning, the history of the cosmos, Crowley's joke, the flick-book Moebius strip, and the scrabble tiles spelling out a different anagram of Promethea on every page. No single image or section of any page can be taken in isolation. Each part must relate to the whole and in so doing form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This relates not so much to ideas of holism or gestalt theory but more to notions of the Dialectic in the immanently unfolding of creative ideas that the reader is able to be an active participant in the rewriting as they engage with the multiple layers of meaning in these stunning constellations.

The manner in which the reader is being asked to find new ways of reading as each page is presented to them is not a form of modernist foregrounding of form,

or form for its own sake. On the contrary, it is form and content brought together onto a single path as a dialectical conception of the relationship between the finite and infinite. And this is a theme which is seen in many other parts and issues of *Promethea*, such as pages 15 and 16 of the tantric issue #10, which is contained within an image of the Ouroboros; as well as Sophie's journey to help Barbara, a former *Promethea*, find her late husband Steve. This Journey that spans issues 13# to #23 and takes the pair on a journey up the *Tree of Life* and culminates in the rebirth of Barbra and Steve in the new-born bodies of two African American twins as they re-emerge into the world. This aspect of the book ties in closely with other themes related to Nietzsche's Eternal Return which once again links the book back to the theme of the One and the Infinite. These themes of infinite returns are superbly rendered in final issue #32 of *Promethea* (2005; **Figure 4**), in which each page when placed together form two large images, one on each side of the new formed 'poster' in which the entire story can be read in a multiplicity of ways and reveal two hidden images from the book that are only visible when placed together in this form.



Figure 4: *Promethea* #32, Alan Moore, J.H. Williams III, Mick Gray, Jeromy Cox, © Americas best Comics, 2005.

However, for all of its stunning novelty and creativity, for all of the ways in which *Promethea* addresses ideas of truth and of living a good life, the point has to be made that this wonderful comic book, co-created by the team of Williams, Moore, Gray, and Cox, only reaches the third of the choices that we are confronted with in our understanding of the relationship between the Infinite and the One that I have outlined above. I suggest this is because if we suppress or destroy the relationship between the One and the Infinite, but still attempt to keep some kind of faith in existence as something divine but finite and powerless, then here we must propose a new pagan religion. In doing this we must offer a new way of understanding the relationship between the One and the Infinite that is without transcendent power, something like an image of perfection inside the world. The only real problem with this choice, the actualisation of a new form of paganism, is that it is still a reactionary position. It is not a mere return to Christian ideas in new robes, as in the example from *Silver Surfer #11*, but is actually a return to a choice not too dissimilar from the one chosen in Classical Antiquity. It is a very beautiful solution, a purely aesthetic position of many gods, such as poetry, creativity and the recreation of existence based upon an image of God. A man-made image of *creation ex nihilo* brought into being by a finite god, a powerless god, a weak god who does not push us around or demand sacrifice but guides us towards creativity, truth and the good. The only problem is that this divine weakness leaves us merely hoping for change rather than actually trying to make it happen. And in this world, the one we presently find ourselves in, this beautiful and aesthetic approach might be less than we need?

Reflections

So, is a positive definition of the infinite possible? One that doesn't rely upon the finite as its opposition in order for it to be defined. Can we find a new conception of the infinite as something mundane, something that eschews the notion of the One yet still defines itself in terms of a pure multiplicity? And is it possible to explore these ideas in the form of a comic book? The three comics that I have begun to explore in this article illustrate a variety of approaches to this question of the One and the Infinite and begin to find answers to the philosophical questions of living

a good life, understanding truth, and embracing the new. *Promethea* gets about as close as any contemporary work of art can in attempting to present a positive definition of the infinite. But even this work falls back upon a weak sense of the One and is not able to break free from a connection to the infinite as linked to the sacred and the transcendental. So, what would a comic book look like that attempted to represent a positive definition to the infinite that is mundane and broken off from the One is still an elusive question for us, but the idea that popular comic books might be seen as works of philosophy is, I hope, far less elusive.

Editorial Note

This article is part of the Creating Comics, Creative Comics Special Collection, edited by Brian Fagence (University of South Wales) and Geraint D'Arcy (University of South Wales) with editorial support from Ernesto Priego (City, University of London). This article extends the symposium paper 'UCOs, or Beyond the Marriage of Philosophy and Sequential Storytelling' presented as part of the Creating Comics Creative Comics Symposium at USW, Cardiff in 2018. Any third-party images have been fully attributed and have been included in this article as scholarly references for educational purposes under Educational Fair Use/Dealing only.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Aristotle.** 2001. *The Basic Works of Aristotle. De Poetica*, McKeon, R (ed.), Translated by Ingram Bywater. New York: The Modern Library.
- Barth, J.** 1988. *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for print, tape, live voice*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Benjamin, W.** 2003. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translation by John Osbourne. London & New York: Verso.
- Crowley, A.** 2004. *Magick: Book 4 Libra Aba*. Boston: Red Wheel/Weiser.
- King, T, Bagenda, B and Fajardo, R, Jr.** 2015–2016. *The Omega Men*. Burbank, CA: DC Comics.

Marx, K. with Fredrich Engels. 1998. *The German Ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books.

Slott, DM and Allred, LA. 2015. *Silver Surfer #011: Never After*. New York: Marvel Worldwide Incorporated.

Williams, JH, III, Moore, A, Gray, M and Cox, J. 1999–2005. *Promethea*. La Jolla, CA: Americas Best Comics.

How to cite this article: Hornsby, I. 2019. ...Comic Books, Möbius Strips, Philosophy and... *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship*, 9(1): 7, pp.1–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/cg.151>

Published: 04 April 2019

Copyright: © 2019 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Third-party content is included in articles for research and educational purposes only under Academic Fair Dealing/Fair Use. Unless otherwise stated all third-party content is copyright its original owners; all images of and references to characters and comic art presented on this site are ©, ® or ™ their respective owners.



The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS The Open Access logo, consisting of the words 'OPEN ACCESS' followed by a circular icon containing a stylized padlock with an open keyhole.