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ABOUT THE COVER



“Twilight”

The cover photo was taken during the final moments of an early Autumn evening twilight in a town in Lower Saxony, Germany.

This photo captures the last streaks of the setting sun and the eventual welcome of nighttime. People often mistake twilight to be just a morning occurrence, yet it is technically that moment between both dawn and sunrise (morning twilight) and sunset and dusk (evening twilight). At this extreme end of dusk in the photo, the evening twilight welcomes the total darkness that surrounds the individual once the final rays have vanished. At this point, one is left with only the sparse lamps to guide one's path and ponders whether it is still prudent to continue the journey or to simply walk back home. Twilight is this moment of reconsidering our journeys, the value of the destination, and the reason we began in the first place. The constant threats of the darkness play in our minds as we pace ourselves either slower, to be more alert of our surroundings, or faster to arrive quicker. But do we really notice when twilight begins or ends?

Twilight is a phase, just like ourselves—

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Photograph by Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, 2023
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About the Journal

KRITIKE is the official open access (OA) journal of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), Manila, Philippines. It is a Filipino peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, and international journal of philosophy founded by a group of UST alumni. The journal seeks to publish articles and book reviews by local and international authors across the whole range of philosophical topics, but with special emphasis on the following subject strands:

- **Filipino Philosophy**
- **Oriental Thought and East-West Comparative Philosophy**
- **Continental European Philosophy**
- **Anglo-American Philosophy**

The journal primarily caters to works by professional philosophers and graduate students of philosophy, but welcomes contributions from other fields (literature, cultural studies, gender studies, political science, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, inter alia) with strong philosophical content.

The word "kritike" is Greek from the verb "krinein," which means to discern. Hence, kritike means the art of discerning or the art of critical analysis. Any form of philosophizing is, in one way or another, a "critique" of something. Being critical, therefore, is an attitude common to all philosophical traditions. Indeed, the meaning of philosophy is critique and to be philosophical is to be critical.

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Featured Article

From Exclusion to Inclusion: The Case of Filipino Women Philosophers

Marella Ada V. Mancenido-Bolaños

Abstract: I argue in this article that, apart from foreign women philosophers, Filipino women philosophers also deserve due recognition. Moreover, I advocate for the inclusion of the works of Filipino women philosophers in the canon of writings required to philosophy students, alongside the works of Filipino male philosophers. I, first, discuss the general exclusion of women philosophers in the history of philosophy, emphasizing some biases against the works of these women. I, then, turn to the case of rather unsung Filipino women philosophers who are pioneers in their fields. I provide my preliminary notes on the interesting contributions of Magdelana Villaba, Josephine Pasricha, Narcisa Paredes-Canilao, and Mary John Mananzan. The aim of this article is not to be exhaustive, but, rather, to encourage conversation that will hopefully change the terrain of Filipino philosophy.

Keywords: Filipino women philosophers, Filipino philosophy, philosophy curriculum in the Philippines, gender in philosophy

"Somewhere, in the deep recesses of the Himalayas, a flower blooms for the Filipino women, subjectively and consciously."
—Josephine Pasricha¹

Looking at the current approved course plans for General Education (GE) in the Department of Philosophy of the University of Sant Tomas (UST), the limited number of women philosophers included in the lists of readings is noticeable. Often only Simone de Beauvoir, Philippa Foot, Hannah Arendt, Gayatri Spivak, Onora O'Neil, Kristina Korsgard, Mary Midgeley, Eleanore Stump, and Luce Irigaray are included. Moreover, these

¹ Josephine Pasricha, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Rereading the Canon through Feminism," in *Karunungan: A Journal of Philosophy*, 21 (2004), 82.

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women thinkers are discussed only towards the end of the semester where only one or two are included if only to honor the fact that ethical issues on gender and women's rights are part of the syllabus. Given the present circumstances in the country where classes are suspended due to natural calamities and public holidays, there is always the possibility that the thinkers placed at end of the course outline will not be covered.

In terms of course offerings, Feminism as a course was not offered in the undergraduate level until the first semester of academic year 2022–2023. This was made possible because a more flexible curriculum was implemented. The new curriculum includes elective units that can be utilized in offering non-traditional philosophy courses. In 2004, A Feminist Reading of Theology of the Body was offered by Josephine Pasricha at the UST Graduate School. Then in 2012, although there was an attempt to offer another graduate course on feminism, the male professor spent more time discussing Plato instead of the feminists. More recently, in 2020, the graduate course Women and Phenomenology: Conrad-Martius, Stein, and Arendt was offered by Gina Opiniano. Moreover, Opiniano did her best to include more women thinkers in her undergraduate course on Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. For instance, she included in the reading list the works of The Pythagoreans, Aspasia, Diotima of Mantinea, Arete, Hipparchia, Pamphile, Epicurean Women, The Stoic Logicians, and Hypatia.

Admittedly, the above attempts are noticeable developments, but not radical enough to shift the philosophical terrain in the country. Through technology, materials are made readily available. As such, access to the writings of women philosophers should prompt an increase in their readership and acceptance. Inasmuch as women philosophers also write on mainstream philosophical areas, I strongly think that GE courses should include the writings of Sonia Kruks (existentialism), Carol Gilligan (care ethics), Martha Nussbaum (ethics), Nancy Fraser (critical theory), Iris Marion Young (theory of justice and political philosophy), Sally Haslanger (epistemology, metaphysics, political philosophy), Andrea Nye (philosophy of language), Marilyn Friedman (cultural diversity and feminism), Sandra Bartky (body politics), Maria Lugones (gender, race, colonialism), Sarrah Ruddick (feminist ethics), Linda Martin Alcoff (epistemology), Miranda Fricker (ethics and epistemology), and Rae Langton (social justice), to name a few. Emerita Quito's article "What is Philosophy?"² is a good material for introductory discussion.

The old view that philosophy is a man's world needs critical revaluation, as a revisitation of the history of ideas reveal otherwise. The truth

² Emerita Quito, "What Is Philosophy?," in *Karunungan: A Journal of Philosophy*, 15 (1998), 28–45.

is that women have profoundly contributed to the development of ideas and, unfortunately, were left at the sidelines just because society decided on the dominance of only one gender. This wrong assumption about philosophy must be questioned and it is imperative among us academic philosophers that more gender inclusive course plans should be used.

The Exclusion of Women Philosophers

In this section, I will present how women philosophers were excluded from mainstream philosophy and how their works were ignored because of the language and writing style that they have employed.

In a case study, Sara Protasi addresses the challenges one might experience in teaching ancient women philosophers.³ She notes that “we know that there were women in ancient philosophical schools, and most of those unnamed and unknown women have been all forgotten until very recently.”⁴

Mary Ellen Waithe’s *History of Women Philosophers*⁵ published in 1987 provides an extensive list of women thinkers like Theano, Myia, Damo, Arignote, Perictione, Melissa, Phintys, Aspasia, Diotima, Arete, Hipparchia, Pamphile, Leontione, Menexene, Argeia, Theognis, Artemisia, Pantalcea, and Hypatia. We also have Asclepigenia, Asiotea, Cleobulina, Lasthenia, Julia Domna, and Macrina.⁶ How many of these thinkers are we familiar with? How many of their works do we have access to?

Protasi notes that some of these thinkers were talked about not because of the significance of their works but because of their romantic relations with male scholars. Moreover, there is a reluctance to discuss their ideas in class because sources are not readily available or the authenticity of materials at hand are questionable. Sometime women thinkers are construed as fictional. Protasi also argues that “when it comes to women philosophers, then, skepticism verging on outright denial has for a long time been the default attitude.”⁷ These women thinkers are believed to have taught in traditional philosophical schools presumably on orthodox topics and following established methods. This is evidenced by the treatises they wrote,

³ Sara Protasi, “Teaching Ancient Women Philosophers: A Case Study,” in *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, 6:3 (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.5206/fpq/2020.3.8437>>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Mary Ellen Waithe, *History of Women Philosophers* (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987). Waithe published five volumes of *History of Women Philosophers* from 600 BC to 1900. This voluminous book is a good source for those who are uninitiated in the works of women philosophers.

⁶ Protasi, “Teaching Ancient Women Philosophers,” 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8

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one of which is Phintys's "On the Moderation of Women." Their works are comparable to their male counterparts, like "Aesara's conception of the soul, which is very similar to Plato's but differs in linking kindness and love."⁸

The works of ancient women philosophers have been devalued even by contemporary scholars. In Protasi's work, she notes Peter Adamson's view that Aspasia is a "controversial historical figure who attracted extreme views: she was hated and despised by Pericles's political adversaries, who mocked her as a prostitute."⁹ Protasi observes that Adamson's work "falls prey to the default skepticism toward ancient philosophers."¹⁰

There may be a dearth of resources and scholars willing to take on the challenge of teaching ancient women philosophers, but at least, as Protasi notes, there is a gaining traction, and it is becoming accepted in mainstream philosophy.

It is not just ancient women philosophers who are excluded but also modern and contemporary women philosophers. If we look at the commonly used course plans on modern to contemporary philosophy, we will find the canons by male thinkers but there is no representation of women thinkers who corresponded with and influenced them. Elizabeth of Bohemia's correspondence with Descartes, for example, might have urged Descartes to further clarify his concept of dualism. Ann Conway's take on monadology has influenced Leibniz, but her works are hardly mentioned. Germaine de Staël's take on the new science can be read alongside Kant's transcendental philosophy. Lou Salome and Rosa Luxemburg can also be part of the usual reading list.¹¹

Meanwhile, Margaret Atherton notes that we have an impression that during the modern period, only men were philosophers. This is because "majority of the works of women have not been republished since they were originally written, and they can be found only in a few research libraries or on microfilm."¹² And so, we raise the same question that Protasi asks: "whether they are commensurable at all and whether those who wrote about 'womanly' matters in 'womanly' ways did philosophy at all"¹³ and "what qualifies as philosophy and relatedly what qualifies as teaching introduction to philosophy."¹⁴

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ Margaret Atherton, *Women Philosophers of the Early and Modern Period* (USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994).

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³ Protasi, "Teaching Ancient Women Philosophers," 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This phenomenon was also explained by Manon Garcia in her book, *We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women's Lives*, where she talks about the silencing of the oppressed. Women in philosophy are assumed to be less intelligent than their male counterparts.¹⁵ This is evidenced by our preference to read/teach the male thinker instead of the female thinker who offers the same idea; often, male resource persons are invited to speak in conferences instead of women who also specialize in the same fields. All these actions invalidate women's capacity to reason.

Rae Langton describes feminist epistemology as "epistemology aware of its own feminist implications."¹⁶ Langton emphasizes that there are two strands of feminist contribution to epistemology, that is, to "show how, when it comes to knowledge, women get left out" and "to show how, when it comes to knowledge, women get hurt."¹⁷ She adds that women's lives are left out by certain bodies of knowledge. Women are not acknowledged in history, her unpaid labor is not discussed in economics, and male-only samples are the ones used in studies in medicine. In philosophy, there is an assumption that women are not rational.¹⁸ To a certain degree, woman's confidence is also an issue. There are instances that "she knows but she does not know that she knows, and therefore does not know."¹⁹ This happens because of her condition: there are barriers to knowledge. This can be addressed by working on women's education and literacy and by changing the discriminatory attitude that excludes them from fields of knowledge.²⁰

What women know about the world fails to enter this official story about life, the universe and everything, and the incompleteness and partiality of the story goes unnoticed. So even when women do achieve knowledge—do break free from various material and conceptual constraints on knowledge described above—their knowledge may fail to look like knowledge to men, so that women, again, fail to be counted as knowers.

¹⁵ Manon Garcia, *We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women's Lives* (UK: Princeton University Press, 2021).

¹⁶ Rae Langton, "Feminist Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed. by Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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Seen this way, one goal of feminism is to correct the impartiality of existing knowledge.²¹

These discussions just show us that women are conditioned to view themselves as being incapable of knowledge which results in their inability to visualize themselves as knowers. This also bars them from producing new forms of knowledge.

In relation to the foregoing issues, we can also say that the philosophical quality of women's writing has been perpetually questioned whether they are philosophical enough to merit recognition. The work of Catherine Beecher is an example.²² In the analysis written by Catherine Villanueva Gardner, she notes that Beecher was neglected as a philosopher because of "the apparent non-philosophical forms of some of her work."²³ Beecher intended it to be that way because she wanted her writings to be more accessible to more women. She wanted women to be empowered by her writings.

Aside from the philosophical essays, Beecher also wrote manuals and letters for women. She wrote this in a language that women during her time can understand. It is for this reason that she was remembered not as a philosopher but as the founder of the discipline of home economics.²⁴ Gardner argues that these manuals and letters on domestic economy are also philosophical.²⁵ Gardner notes that "Beecher's entrance into mainstream tradition comes at a price of ignoring the significance of the role of women in her philosophy for our feminist heritage and neglecting her non-philosophical works: her domestic advice and manuals."²⁶

Gardner suggests a reconsideration of philosophical domains and the inclusion of audiences ignored in traditional philosophical discourse.²⁷ Gardner suggests that we must look for family resemblances which means being flexible with the "notion of what philosophy is and recognize that our disciplinary boundaries may be expanded as we add more philosophers to the canon."²⁸ Moreover, the mainstream philosophical and historical

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²² Catherine Villanueva Gardner, *Empowerment and Interconnectivity: Toward a Feminist History of Utilitarian Philosophy* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2013).

²³ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

approaches are not the problem but the male-dominant philosophical background that frames it.²⁹

Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins, quoting Virginia Valian, notes that there is a crucial dimension in the problem of women exclusion, that is, a “cultural tendency to rate man’s achievements more highly than those of women.”³⁰ Hutchison and Jenkins note:

If women continue to be underrepresented in philosophy, the situation is even more dire for a range of minority groups in a discipline that, despite its claims to speak on behalf of humanity, in fact speaks with a voice composed primarily from white, middle-class, and masculine sources.³¹

The Case of Women Pioneers of Philosophy in the Philippines

Filipino philosophy is usually presented in two ways. First is the ethno-linguistic method popularized by Leonardo Mercado and Florentino Timbreza. Second is the idea of philosophy propounded by Emerita Quito, Alfredo Co, Romualdo Abulad, and Josephine Pasricha who think that as long as there are Filipinos philosophizing, the body of knowledge that they produce is considered as Filipino philosophy. Mercado and Timbreza, both spoke of the importance of language in developing Filipino philosophy. Both turned to various Filipino experiences to prove that Filipino philosophy exists. Meanwhile, Abulad believed that while their generation may not have yet produced a revolutionary idea that could equal the works of our other Eastern and Western counterparts, he was hopeful that in the future, there will be someone whose work will be recognized globally.³²

While certain organizations recognize the contributions of these pioneers in Filipino philosophizing, these organizations have left out thinkers who are also worthy of recognition. In October 2012, the Philosophical Association of the Philippines organized the “Legacy Lectures: Engaging Our Philosophical Pioneers.” They included Abulad, Co, Mercado, Timbreza, and Quito, as well as Manuel Dy, Jr., Leovino Garcia, Florentino Hornedo, Roque Ferriols, Julius Mendoza, Zosimo Lee, Ramon Reyes, and Amable Tuibeo. In November 2018, the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, in partnership

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁰ Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins, *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² Romualdo Abulad, “Kant for Filipinos,” in *Sophia*, 16:2 (1986), 53.

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with the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, organized a similar conference with the theme “The State of Philosophy in the Philippines,” where they highlighted the contributions of Abulad, Co, Dy, Timbreza, and Tuibeo. What was strikingly evident was that, in both events, majority of those who were celebrated were male Filipino philosophers.

How do we consider one to be a pioneer? Do we just simply count the number of their publications? The depth of their publication? Do we look into the years of their service? The university where they took their PhDs? The number of students they mentored? Because if these are our qualifications, then I am sure that the women thinkers are more than qualified. For instance, Pasricha was a pioneer in Indian philosophy and feminism. Moreover, Villaba was a pioneer in Eastern philosophy. The work of Narcisa Paredes-Canilao is also worth mentioning since she has been working on the development of Filipino philosophy, particularly Ilokano philosophy since the 1990s. Sr. Mary John Mananzan was also a pioneer of feminism, as evidenced by the articles she published and the advocacy projects that she is a part of.

In her article, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: Rereading the Canon through Feminism,” Pasricha argues that “for both women philosopher and feminist philosopher in the Philippines ... [they] have been taught and educated, by mostly male philosophy professors,”³³ and for her, “[o]nly one brilliant woman philosopher stands tall in our midst, and that is Emerita Quito.”³⁴ Pasricha, however, questions whether Quito was doing philosophy from a female’s voice or a male’s voice, since “[l]ike most of us Filipino women doing philosophy, [Quito’s writing] is rather a male voice-essentially based on reason, logic and system.”³⁵

Pasricha’s generation might be a generation of forgotten Filipina philosophers. We can observe that young philosophy majors are only exposed to the scholarship of male philosophers from this generation. Like their Western counterparts, the works of these Filipina philosophers have been brushed off as second rate. The depth of their scholarship has always been doubted. For example, the length of Quito’s *Festschrift* was once mocked because it is comprised of only one volume. Villaba’s writings on Eastern philosophy is largely ignored.

³³ Pasricha, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,” 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Preliminary Notes on Some Contributions of Filipino Women Philosophers

In the following I wish to present a brief survey of the rather unsung contributions of Villaba, Pasricha, Paredes-Canilao, and Mananzan. Villaba was a philosophy professor at UST. She was the first lay woman Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters and the UST Graduate School. Most of her published articles are expository accounts of the Eastern philosophical tradition, Indian and Chinese. She has inspired a good number of female philosophy students to take further studies in philosophy. But while her students know Villaba as an expert on Eastern philosophy, they are less familiar with her feminist ideas. For instance, her work *The Mission of Women: A Return to their Origin*,³⁶ was delivered during the opening ceremonies of the academic year 1975–1976 and published as a monograph, is not widely read. For Villaba, the United Nations would not proclaim 1975 as the year of woman if not because of “the thunderous appeal of 61% of the world’s population—the women.”³⁷ Villaba traces the origin of the term *babae*. She notes that *babae* came from the term *sibabay*, a shortened term for “*silang mabababa*,” which is in contrast to the term *lalaki* from the term *silalak*, short for “*silang malalaki*.”³⁸ This distinction maintains the low stature of women in the society: “low in physical resistance, low in social status, low in mentality, low in everything.”³⁹ Villaba then revisited the role of women in the society and insists that “the attitude of the Catholic Church was remarkable for insisting upon the absolute equal individual responsibility for men and women.”⁴⁰ She adds that there is equality in terms of men’s and women’s freedom and spirituality.⁴¹ Moving forward, she emphasizes the important role that women played to make men successful. She notes that Pericles would not have succeeded without Aspasia. Mohandas Gandhi would not have been Mahatma if it were not for his mother Putlibai. Jose Rizal would not have been a hero without his mother Teodora Alonso. “Examples can be multiplied but what is significant is the fact that many times women played the substratum role; men, the accidental role. Well, accidents can be seen; the substratum can only be gleaned.”⁴² Yet, what are celebrated are the triumphs

³⁶ Magdalena Villaba, *The Mission of Women: A Return to Their Original Role* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1975).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

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of men, while the important role that women play are brushed aside. We do not see how their mothers sacrifice themselves, how their wives give up so much of themselves to let their husbands grow and flourish—all these are not seen, only gleaned. Villaba circles back to the idea that men and women are not competitors; they complement each other. It is only through our culture that inequality and injustice happen.

Pasricha was also a philosophy professor at the UST. From 1976 to 1977, she was a Ford Foundation fellow at the University of Delhi, where she studied Oriental Aesthetics and Philosophy. In 2000, she finished her Doctorate in Philosophy (summa cum laude) in UST with a dissertation titled, “A Hermeneutic Translation in Filipino and Gadamerian Meditation of the Indian Epic *Ramayana*.” As a renowned Indologist, she later edited Marvin Reyes and Paz Panganiban’s Filipino translation of the *Kama Sutra*.⁴³

The themes of Pasricha’s early works include Indian philosophy, East–West comparative philosophy, aesthetics, and feminism. In the early 2000s she started working on the philosophy of Karol Wojtyla. She published two books on Wojtyla: *The Future Is Love and Marriage*,⁴⁴ which is based on Wojtyla’s *Love and Responsibility* and *Theology of the Body*, and *Is God Homophobic?: Rediscovering the Writings of John Paul II*, which talks about the relevance of Wojtyla’s philosophy.⁴⁵ She also taught Feminism and Theology of the Body at the UST Graduate School in 2004.

In “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines,”⁴⁶ she argues that “there is no culturally safe space that Filipino women doing Philosophy can enter to find the true self, unconditioned self in its original nature and pure subjectivity in the Philippines.”⁴⁷ To some extent, this remains true today. The tendency, according to Pasricha, is for women philosophers to collectively create spaces where they could be themselves—that is, as women philosophizing. She points out that, being trained by predominantly male mentors, women philosophers still have to struggle with the very tradition they were brought up in. Pasricha calls this *negative canon formation*.⁴⁸ In agreement with Waithe, Pasricha suggests that “the canons of the

⁴³ See also Marella Ada V. Mancenido-Bolaños and Darlene Demandante, “Women and Philosophy: An Initial Move Towards a More Inclusive Practice in the Philippine Context,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 14:1 (June 2020), 9, <<https://www.doi.org/10.25138/14.1.e.1>> .

⁴⁴ Josephine Acosta Pasricha, *Wojtyla: The Future Is Love and Marriage*, on Kindle Scribes, June 1, 2015.

⁴⁵ Josephine Acosta Pasricha, *Is God Homophobic? Rediscovering the Writings of Pope John Paul II*, on Kindle Scribe, January 2014.

⁴⁶ Pasricha, “Doing Philosophy in the Philippines.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

philosophical greats must include women.”⁴⁹ She points out that the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*⁵⁰ edited by Paul Edwards contains nine hundred philosophers but does not include even the three most known women philosophers: Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and Hannah Arendt. She suggests that one way to address this is through the “retrieval of women philosophers for the historical record; another has been the elevation to the canon of the greats of women philosophers: Mary Wollstonecraft Hannah Arendt, and Simone de Beauvoir.”⁵¹

Another Filipina thinker that, I think, is worthy of attention is Paredes-Canilao. She is a Philosophy professor at the University of Philippines, Baguio. Her research interests include critical discourse studies, postcolonial studies, and Indigenous knowledge. Some of her publications focused on *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, feminism, critical pedagogy, and decolonialization. Her article “*Sa Loob ang Kulo: Speaking the Unconscious in the Transformations of Filipino Proverbs*”⁵² presents a deeper discussion of Filipino proverbs tied to language, psychoanalysis, and metaphorology.

While the method of Paredes-Canilao somewhat resembles the ethno-linguistic approach of the previous works of Mercado and Timbreza, hers is neither a simple juxtaposition of proverbs to Filipino experiences nor the search of equivalences between Filipino and Western proverbs. Rather, she uses the work of Damiana L. Eugenio in understanding Filipino proverbs. Through the work of Eugenio, Paredes-Canilao traces the use of proverbs in various regions in the country. She turns to different proverbs bearing the term “*kulo*” to show a kind of “boiling” from within. She then relates the term “*puno*” or being fed up to *kulo*, eventually causing “*pagkulo*” or boiling. She underscores that there is an experience of calmness before one reaches that point of *pagkulo* or *pagkapuno*. The proverbs “slow to anger, but terrible when aroused” and “beware of the anger of the patient person”⁵³ characterize what Paredes-Canilao meant by the moment of calmness before the eruption. Paredes-Canilao writes: “The notion of the piled-up, repressed or suppressed inside needing displacement is a common motif in Philippine proverbs.”⁵⁴ For Paredes-Canilao, these proverbs are not just talking about individuals reaching the boiling point but also about the community that ruptures

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁰ Paul Edwards, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (New York: McMillan Co.), 1967

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Narcisa Paredes-Canilao, “*Sa Loob ang Kulo: Speaking the Unconscious in the Transformations of a Filipino Proverb*,” in *Re(con)figuring Psychoanalysis Critical Juxtaposition of the Philosophical, the Sociohistorical, and the Political*, ed. by Aydan Gülerce (UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 76–92.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

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because of repression.⁵⁵ This notion of boiling is “a description of the physiology of anger [which] would include rise in temperature causing the body to heat up.”⁵⁶ In Tagalog, we use the expression “*kumukulo ang dugo ko*”⁵⁷ to describe our anger or irritation towards a person or a circumstance. She adds that this “*pagkulo*” does not only refer to anger. It could also be used to characterize a kind of creativity as in “*Kaninong pakulo ito? (Whose simmering [idea] is this?)*.”⁵⁸ It could also refer to mischief and social unrest, sex libido, perversion, and quirks.⁵⁹ She stresses that these proverbs are “interesting accounts of psychosocial individuations ... individuals or communities saw themselves or projected themselves as vessels or receptacles.”⁶⁰ Towards the end of her discussion, she engages the works of Derrida, Lacan, and Ricoeur to understand the metaphors. She writes, “Derrida’s fixation on the metaphor to the exclusion of other figures of speech is understandably a result of his view that language is best released from the determination of intentionality and reference.”⁶¹ Using Lacan’s notion of the analysand, she stresses that the “the analysand as discourse and speech act does not confine itself to language but reaches outside itself, first by intentionality, and second by reference to an experience, situation, reality, the world and to its own speaker.”⁶²

More than a metaphor, the concept of “*kulo*” is a metonym “which contributes to restoring the bipolarity of language and the unconscious.”⁶³ What is distinct in Paredes-Canilao’s research is her use of post-structuralist and psychoanalytic concepts. Paredes-Canilao presented the cultural significance of these proverbs and its potentials in unraveling the Filipino consciousness.

Finally, Mary John Mananzan is a Benedictine nun who finished her doctorate in philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Her works focused on feminism, liberation theology, and religious studies. Leslie Ann Liwanag has categorized the themes of her works and discovered that Mananzan’s work focuses mainly on critical philosophy, Filipino worldview, values and ethics, and she has some interest in the appropriation and exposition of non-Filipino theories.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁴ Leslie Ann Liwanag, “Ang Pilosopiya ni Sr. Mary John Mananzan, OSB,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 9, no. 2 (2015), 60–62, <<https://www.doi.org/10.25138/9.2.a.11>>.

In *Woman and Religion*, Mananzan emphasizes the influence of religion women.⁶⁵ She points out to the fact that “the male god image, which is taken for granted in Judeo-Christian culture evolved in a certain period of history during the establishment of patriarchal monotheism,”⁶⁶ which, for her, is a “sharp departure from all previous consciousness.”⁶⁷ She argues that the Bible was attributed to men writers, interpreted and taught by men for the last two thousand years.⁶⁸ She adds that there is a pronounced male domination over women.⁶⁹ One can say that these teachings aided in convincing women that they are the weaker sex and that there is a need to submit to the more dominant sex.

Mananzan named several women who appeared in the Old Testament of the Bible that played significant roles: Deborah, Esther, Ruth, Delilah, and Tamar. Mananzan also notes that “Jesus’ treatment of women went against the accustomed attitude of the Jews.”⁷⁰ It is known that Jesus also chose women to be his disciples. He engaged them in discussions and included them in his mission.⁷¹ For Mananzan, the ecclesiastical patriarchalization caused women to be excluded from the Church. This also led women to follow the stereotypical role exhibited in patriarchal culture.⁷²

Inasmuch as the works of these Filipino women philosophers could be read alongside the works of Filipino male philosophers who write on Eastern thoughts, Filipino culture, and critical philosophy, it is not farfetched to suggest that they should also be included in the canon of Filipino thinkers we require our students to study. These women started their careers in the academe during the period where the educational field was occupied by men; during the time when women’s career was limited to accounting, commerce, physical education, stenotyping, office assistant, dressmaker, housemaid, saleslady.⁷³ They must have mustered so much courage to finally claim their rightful space in the society. While they have played the traditional role of supporting male intellectuals, they have, nevertheless, carved their way out and be recognized for their own achievements. Their perseverance to create

⁶⁵ Mary John Mananzan, *Woman and Religion* (Manila: The Institute of Women’s Studies - St. Scholastica’s College Manila, 1988), 3–4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Cristina Montiel and Mary Racelis Hollnsteiner, *The Filipino Woman: Her Role and Status in Philippine Society* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Institute of Philippine Culture, 1976), 24–25.

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a name for themselves have greatly influenced generations of Filipino women doing philosophy to continue the battle.

Conclusion

The exclusion of women in philosophy in the country is still seen in the ways organizations and individuals give premium to the work of male intellectuals. Over the years, despite the important changes and increasing readership of women intellectuals, the view that philosophy is a man's world still lingers; this is perhaps the reason why there is still only few women who pursue higher studies in philosophy. Marilyn Friedman emphasizes that "there may still be good reasons to promote women's increased participation in the field of philosophy."⁷⁴ It is not enough to simply say that certain events are organized for the works of women and spaces are being opened up for them if our attitude towards their work remains the same. Friedman notes that despite the number of women in the field, women are still underrepresented in sheer numbers and in publications in top-ranked journals. She notes that women have participated in philosophy throughout history, yet they have received little attention and their works are not considered as important philosophical issues.⁷⁵ What I have shown above is just the tip of the iceberg; the rich variety of topics explored by Filipino women philosophers remain to be explored. Moreover, we also have to recognize the fact that there are young budding women scholars who are now contributing important works in various areas of philosophy—they, too, deserve our attention.⁷⁶

I wish to end this article by mentioning some disclaimers. Firstly, my plea is not to replace the male dominated philosophical canon with a women-centered canon; on the contrary, I am merely advocating for the inclusion of women philosophers in the canon because their works may supplement and, perhaps, some may even exceed their male counterparts in terms of depth and sophistication. Secondly, while I am arguing for the inclusion of women

⁷⁴ Marilyn Friedman, "Women in Philosophy: Why Should We Care?," in *Women in Philosophy: What Needs to Change?*, ed. by Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁶ See Preciosa Regina De Joya, "In Search of Filipino Philosophy" (PhD thesis: National University Singapore, Singapore, 2013); Jacklyn Cleofas, "Towards a Practical and Empirically Grounded Account of Utang na Loob as a Filipino Virtue," in *Kritika Kultura*, 33/34 (2019); Mariefe Cruz, "Ang Naging Makaldag na Lakbayin: Isang Pagsipat sa Mahalagang Yugto sa Kasaysayan ng Kritikal na Pamimilosopiyang Filipino," in *Mabini Review*, 11 (2022), <<https://apps.pup.edu.ph/ojs/assets/issue/attachment/6c575005f7b3817673babb0211a230e9cf0368ac.pdf>>. See also Leslie Ann Liwanag's articles on Filipino philosophy and Sr. Mary John Mananzan.

philosophers, some readers might find this article partial to the writers I have discussed above. This is, of course, not my intention. Rather, my humble aim is simply to share my preliminary notes of some of the interesting contributions of some Filipino women philosophers. My intention is to encourage conversation and, hopefully, the public will build on my humble offering. Yes, there are more Filipino women philosophers out there who deserve our attention—but, admittedly, one short article is not enough to give them justice. Thirdly, alongside foreign women philosophers, I argue that our local women philosophers deserve to be recognized. As a Filipina doing philosophy, I will continuously be hopeful that in the future, philosophy will be more inclusive and that we work together to fill the gender gaps not just in the way we choose our teaching materials but also in our discipline. It is about time that we turn our gaze towards the contributions of Filipina women to Filipino philosophizing.

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Article

A Critique of Christopher Ryan Maboloc's Appropriation of Chantal Mouffe's Theory of Radical Democracy

Kyle Alfred M. Barte

Abstract: I argue that Christopher Ryan Maboloc's deployment of Chantal Mouffe's radical democratic framework to characterize Rodrigo Duterte's politics is a misappropriation. First, I provide an exposition of Mouffe's radical democracy, emphasizing its two crucial features: (1) the objective of the radical reformation of the institutions of liberal democracy so that its ideals—liberty and equality for all—become effective; and (2) the provision of the space to struggle for liberty and equality, espousing the embrace of agonistic conflict (a non-violent struggle between legitimate adversaries) as opposed to antagonism (a violent conflict). Next, I present Maboloc's interpretation of radical democracy and how his application of it to Duterte includes an anti-liberal dimension and the embrace of antagonistic practices, such as violence. Finally, I conclude that Maboloc's mislabeling of Duterte as a radical politician can be traced to a misinterpretation of the two features of radical democracy. I show that Maboloc, contrary to Mouffe, views "radical" as a "radical break" from liberal democracy, while the embrace of conflict means an embrace of antagonistic practices. These misinterpretations are the reasons why Maboloc sees Duterte's anti-liberal and antagonistic actions—despite their obvious incompatibility with Mouffe's radical democracy—as indications of Duterte's radicality.

Keywords: Duterte, Mouffe, radical democracy, agonism

Since Rodrigo Duterte burst into the national limelight when he ran for, and eventually won, the Philippine presidential position in 2016, vigorous discussions have taken place among the country's leading political thinkers apropos his relation with democracy. One of these discourses, which until now is still gaining steam despite Duterte's tenure being well over, centers on Duterte's radical politics primarily proposed by

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Christopher Ryan Maboloc, a Filipino philosopher from Davao. As his argument goes, Duterte's politics embodies the radical democratic project propounded by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe. For the latter, radical democracy is a political framework which proposes that democracy can be extended and consolidated by embracing difference, conflict, and dissent.¹ Through Mouffe's language, Maboloc argues that Duterte—by aggressively antagonizing the ruling elites in the Philippines—is a radical politician who has inaugurated radical democracy in the country.²

However, a cursory glance at Maboloc's claims reveals apparent divergences in his reading of Duterte as a radical politician with the theoretical wellspring he purportedly comes from. For one, while Mouffe argues that the goal of radical democracy is the extension and consolidation of the principles of liberal democracy,³ Duterte's politics seemingly moved towards the opposite direction: to the sustained attack of liberal institutions and individual rights. Moreover, while Mouffe thinks that radicalizing democracy necessitates the embrace of conflict and dissent, Duterte's administration appeared to be strongly averse to these elements. These initial observations suggest that Maboloc's appropriation of the Mouffean concept may be marked by some limitations and contradictions that he perhaps did not foresee. In this light, this paper aims to critically analyze Maboloc's deployment of radical democracy in his reading of Duterte's politics by revisiting his conceptual source—Chantal Mouffe.

A project similar to this has recently been undertaken by Regletto Aldrich Imbong, Jerry Imbong, and Patrick Gerard Torres in an article they co-authored, titled "Chantal Mouffe on the Radical Politics of Rodrigo Duterte."⁴ In it, they criticized the growing radical democratic scholarship in the southern region of the Philippines—whose central figure is Maboloc—by highlighting the disconnect between Duterte's actions and the elements of radical democracy developed by Mouffe. For them, there is a fundamental incompatibility between Duterte's illiberal regime and the radical democratic framework whose prerequisites are liberal democratic institutions.⁵ Indeed, they interviewed no less than Mouffe herself to share that she distances herself from Duterte and that she is worried about her

¹ Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera, "Introduction: Tracing Radical Democracy and the Internet," in *Radical Democracy and the Internet: Interrogating Theory and Practice*, ed. by Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8–11.

² Christopher Ryan Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte* (Cotabato City: ElziStyle Bookshop, 2022), 233.

³ Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 40.

⁴ Regletto Aldrich Imbong, Jerry Imbong, and Patrick Gerard Torres, "Chantal Mouffe on the Radical Politics of Rodrigo Duterte," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 21 (2022).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

theory being (mis)used to justify illiberal regimes.⁶ Because of this, Imbong et al. accuse Maboloc of misusing a theory to develop a position which “appears to be a wholesale apology of the murderous rule of Duterte.”⁷ But while I think that their paper has adequately shed light on the aporia in calling Duterte’s politics “radical” in the Mouffean tradition, I also think that a renewed and sustained critique of Maboloc’s arguments is warranted for reasons both practical and theoretical.

Practically, their critique faces the threat of being overshadowed by the growing number of literatures that endorses or ignores, whether wittingly or unwittingly, the theoretical contradictions in Maboloc’s arguments. What is common in the literature—comprised of the anthology *Radical Politics in the Philippines: A Reader*,⁸ as well as the individual publications of Ian Clark Parcon,⁹ Benjiemen Labastin,¹⁰ Symel De Guzman-Daulat,¹¹ and Gerry Arambala¹²—is an open acknowledgement of Maboloc’s radical democratic or Mouffean scholarship. Arambala even goes so far as to declare Maboloc as the country’s leading radical democratic theorist.¹³ Furthermore, theoretically, Imbong et al.’s paper left other potentially problematic areas in Maboloc’s radical democratic thinking unexplored, specifically the former’s (mis)use of the principle of agonistic conflict in Mouffe’s democratic paradigm. Given these factors, this paper intends to practically and theoretically supplement the critique against Maboloc’s radical democratic position. Considering he is unofficially labeled as the “leading radical democratic theorist in the Philippines,” it is perhaps only

⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸ This work is a compilation of the works of five scholars hailing from the southern region of the Philippines. Maboloc wrote the introduction of the book. Meanwhile, the foreword mentions Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau as their source of the concept of radical politics and Maboloc’s studies as one of their anchors. See Benjiemen Labastin, Menelito Mansueto, Ruben Balotol, Rogelio Bayod, and Gerry Arambala, *Radical Politics in the Philippines: A Reader* (USA: KDP Publishing, 2022), <<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssolar-85224-7>>.

⁹ Ian Clark Parcon, “Understanding Duterteism: Populism and Democratic Politics in the Philippines,” in *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 49:3 (2021).

¹⁰ Benjiemen A. Labastin, “Two Faces of Duterteism: Two Visions of Democracy in the Philippines,” in *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Special Issue (December 2018), <https://ses-journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2_Labastin_Special-Issue_Dec2018.pdf>.

¹¹ Symel De Guzman-Daulat, “Christopher Ryan Maboloc’s Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte,” in *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture*, 26:3 (2022), <<https://ajol.ateneo.edu/budhi/articles/579/7564>>.

¹² Gerry Flores Arambala, “COVID-19’s Impact on Marginalized Populations and Support for the Future: Ozamiz Politics and a Radical Means to Flatten the Pandemic Curve,” in *Handbook of Research on the Impact of COVID-19 on Marginalized Populations and Support for the Future*, ed. by Haris Abd Wahab, Jahid Siraz Chowdhury, Siti Hajar Binti Abu Bakar Ah, and Mohd Rashid Mohd Saad (USA: IGI Global, 2021), 99–111.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

right for Maboloc's ideas to be subjected to careful scrutiny. Truly, if the works of the supposed authority figure in the field of radical democracy in the country bear some grave contradictions, which this paper will attempt to expose, this might lead to the formation of a local radical democratic school of thought where some faulty dimensions are taken for granted, proliferated, and used as its foundation. Thus, critiquing the contradictions in Maboloc's arguments will only serve to benefit the burgeoning radical democratic movement in the Philippines.

Echoing Imbong et al., this paper argues that Maboloc's judgment that Duterte is a radical politician who has inaugurated radical democracy in the Philippines is a result of a misappropriation of Mouffe's concept. This paper traces the root of the problem in two exegetical errors that Maboloc has committed. First is a mistake in the interpretation of the term "radical" in radical democracy. As I will fully explain later, Maboloc interprets the term "radical" as a "radical break" with liberal democratic institutions, departing from Mouffe's assertion that the aim of radical democracy is not to treat liberal democracy as the enemy to be destroyed but something that must be radically reformed to make it properly operative. And second is a semantic mistake of the term "antagonism." Antagonism, for Mouffe, refers to the notion that objectivities can only exist by virtue of their differential relations with a constitutive outside. This means that antagonism or conflict can never be eradicated and thus the process of radicalizing democracy necessitates embracing and containing it so that it is not expressed antagonistically—conflict between enemies who want to destroy one another—but rather *agonistically*—conflict where the other is seen as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must not be obliterated.¹⁴ Given this distinction, I will show later how Duterte's conflictual politics is more akin to antagonism than agonism, something which Maboloc did not perceive as a result of him collapsing the two concepts together. These oversights, I contend, are the reasons why Maboloc sees Duterte's politics as radical despite the latter's obvious illiberal policies and antagonistic practices.

The structure of this paper will be as follows. The first section will provide an exposition of Mouffe's theory of radical democracy. The second section will attempt to reconstruct Maboloc's appropriation of radical democracy developed in his book *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*. Finally, the third section will attempt to expose the contradictions in Maboloc's usage of radical democracy in his reading of Duterte's politics.

¹⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 18–19.

Chantal Mouffe's Radical Democratic Project

The theory of radical democracy was first sketched by Mouffe in a book, titled *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, which she co-authored with Ernesto Laclau in 1985.¹⁵ The book proposed a reformulation of leftist politics after Marxism, which was bogged down by numerous catastrophes and pitfalls, slowly lost credence in the 1970s. The problem with Marxism, as Laclau and Mouffe pointed out, was its essentialist presumptions that “determine *a priori* agents of change, levels of effectiveness in the field of the social, and privileged points and moments of rupture.”¹⁶ Viewed from a postmodern vantage point, they insist that such an essentialist theoretical paradigm is disconnected from the ontic content of modern democracies which they believe is pluralistic and indeterminable.

To emphasize this point, they followed the analysis of Claude Lefort to narrate that modern democracies are specifically characterized by an empty seat of power after the Prince, due to the French democratic revolution in the late 18th century, was symbolically stripped of his role as transcendental guarantor.¹⁷ With the death of the Prince (or of God in the Nietzschean corpus), the thread which stitched society into a single discourse was loosened, leading to the destabilization of society. This cataclysmic event is exactly what Jean-François Lyotard diagnoses as the “postmodern condition” of the late 20th century whose climate of “incredulity towards metanarratives” gave rise to the fragmentation of the social into heterogeneous and incommensurable language games.¹⁸ This condition, according to Mouffe, is a terrain of instability: “a society without clearly defined outlines,” and “a social structure that is impossible to describe from the perspective of a single, or universal, point of view.”¹⁹

Laclau and Mouffe think that this pluralistic and unstable ground of modern democracies ultimately renders the Marxist metanarrative and central categories untenable. They assert that the postmodern condition of modern democracies makes it impossible to accept the Marxist belief in the universal class, of the linear progression of society, and the historical necessity of a stable and fully-reconciled communist society.²⁰ Thus, a

¹⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2001).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 178–179.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 11.

²⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 4.

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“going beyond” Marxism to reframe the emancipatory struggle using an ontological paradigm better suited to the ontic content of modern democracies is necessitated.

In the process, they updated the Marxist arsenal with new theoretical weapons coming from the latest philosophical developments of the late 20th century. For instance, they borrowed and recalibrated Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony through which society appears as a “discursive space” whose structure and configuration, they wrote, “far from being the only natural or possible societal order, is the expression of a certain configuration of power relations.”²¹ In side-stepping the Hegelian/Marxist “unfolding of Spirit or History” thesis, their acceptance of hegemony as the “logic of the social” led them to the perspective that the structure of society is not predetermined but is instead underpinned by power relations. For Mouffe, this means that power cannot be conceived as something external to the objectivity of the social; rather, power is constitutive of objectivity.²²

From the poststructuralists and postmodernists, Laclau and Mouffe developed the notion of “antagonism” which they consider as the central contribution of their book. They begin by claiming that in a world devoid of essences, the existence of every hegemonic order or objectivity (the inside) is only possible through its differential relation with a constitutive outside that, paradoxically, prevents its completion.²³ In other words, the inside and outside, while incommensurable, nevertheless stand as one another's condition of possibility and impossibility—“possible” inasmuch as an objectivity can only exist through its relational difference with the other; “impossible” inasmuch as the other is always there to prevent the inside's full enclosure or existing in-itself. This irresolvable tension between inside and outside is what they called antagonism.

Armed with these new thinking tools, they developed the project of radical democracy to supplant Marxism as the new project of the Left. What then is radical democracy? More specifically, what does it mean when the term “radical” is placed before democracy? According to Paolo Bolaños, following the definition provided by C. Douglas Lummis, the term “radical” is not a modifier of democracy but points to the actuality that democracy, in and of itself, is fundamentally radical.²⁴ This means that the term “radical

²¹ *Ibid.*, xvi.

²² Chantal Mouffe, “For a Politics of Democratic Identity,” lecture, available from <https://www.macba.cat/antagonismos/english/09_04.html>.

²³ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 13.

²⁴ Paolo A. Bolaños, “Critical Theory and the Prospects of Radical Democracy,” in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 14:2 (December 2020), <<http://doi.org/10.25138/14.2.a2>>, 22.

democracy” is in fact tautological given how radicality is a feature that is congenital to the structure of democracy. Bolaños’s take, as well as that of Lummis, also reflect Mouffe’s position on the subject matter albeit with slight alterations. The latter, taking as her starting point the constitutive principles of liberal democracy—that all people are free and equal—asserts that “it is not possible to find more radical principles for organizing society.”²⁵ Unlike Bolaños and Lummis, Mouffe does not suggest that democracy is essentially radical—she is a non-essentialist after all—but that democracy is, relatively speaking, the most radical form of social makeup within the current horizon of our vocabulary of social imaginaries. This is why, in a work written more than two decades after her groundbreaking book with Laclau, she clarifies that the term “radical” must not be confused with a “radical break” from liberal democracy.²⁶ She asserts that radical democracy does not advocate a total rupture from the existing liberal democratic order despite its associated problems.

This leads to the follow-up question: if democracy is the most radical political order, why is there a need to radicalize it? Mouffe answers this by arguing that democracy’s radicality has been crippled by today’s dominant neoliberal order whose central tenet—liberty of the market—has eroded the democratic principles of equality and popular sovereignty.²⁷ By privileging the interests of capital, neoliberalism has created an asymmetrical power structure that betrays the liberal democratic promise of dispensing liberty and equality for all. However, Mouffe understands that the point is not to reject liberal democracy tout court. As a product of hegemonic powers, its structure can be rearticulated in ways that are more effective in realizing its ideals.²⁸ To this end, the “radical” in radical democracy pertains to a politics of “radical reformism” that accepts the principles of liberal democracy as legitimate but engaging with it in order to implement a different hegemonic configuration.²⁹ The radical democratic project, therefore, can “be conceived as a radicalization of the existing democratic institutions, with the result that the principles of liberty and equality become effective in an increasing number of social relations.”³⁰ For Laclau and Mouffe, such hegemony will lead to the promotion of

²⁵ Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic Politics Today,” preface to *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 1.

²⁶ Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 36. See also Paulina Tambakaki, “Agonism Reloaded: Potentia, Renewal and Radical Democracy,” in *Political Studies Review*, 15:4 (2017), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929916635882>>, 580.

²⁷ Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 12–13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

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dispositions that, in the words of their commentator Anna Marie Smith, do not “tolerate domination in any form,”³¹ and a climate of heightened sensitivity to issues of social justice in all facets of society.

But despite their endorsement of democracy’s radical articulation, they also accept that it would be a dangerous mistake to posit a fully-realized radical democratic hegemonic order. Informed by the principle of antagonism, they understand that the radical democratic discourse leads to the unavoidable process of demarcating it from a constitutive outside.³² No discourse, after all, is free from power. Hence, radical democratic theory anticipates that its discourse has unintentional anti-democratic or exclusionary effects which, if naturalized, lead to subordination and oppression. Thus, though democracy ought to be radicalized, its process nevertheless must come to terms with the impossibility of its full realization. In a sense, it is possible only as an impossibility—a democracy that is always “to be.”

To this end, instead of envisaging a fully-realized society where all differences are resolved, a project of radical democracy “requires the existence of multiplicity, of plurality and of conflict, and sees in them the *raison d’être* of politics,” Mouffe writes.³³ Indeed, the illusion of a homogeneous society will only lead to the delegitimization of conflicting alternatives which further implies the disappearance of the possibility of resisting the dominant power at the center. The people, in this context, are rendered politically powerless, reduced to approving the “rational” policies of the expert administrators.³⁴ Mouffe warns that instead of advancing democracy, this conflict-less terrain actually endangers it by leaving a void for the extreme right to occupy. As she writes:

In this increasingly ‘one-dimensional’ world, in which any possibility of transformation of the relations of power has been erased, it is not surprising that right-wing populist parties are making significant inroads in several countries. In many cases they are the only ones denouncing the ‘consensus at the centre’ and trying to occupy the terrain of contestation deserted by the left.³⁵

³¹ Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 119.

³² Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xvi–xvii.

³³ Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 18.

³⁴ Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 4.

³⁵ Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 7.

This is why the embrace of conflict is vital for the radical democratic project. Such process opens channels through which the excluded and marginalized in a given hegemonic order can contest the established discourse and fight for their liberty and equality. Far from being impediments to democracy, Mouffe thinks that conflict is a sign that democracy is alive and healthy.³⁶

It is important to remember, however, that Mouffe does not simply advocate the embrace of violent and destructive modes of conflict. In fact, she distinguishes two types of conflict—antagonism and agonism—while simultaneously privileging the latter over the former. Antagonism is a type of conflict between enemies who want to destroy one another; while agonism is conflict where violence is defused, where the other is treated as an adversary “whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated” and whose ideas we will compete with “but we will not question his right to defend them.”³⁷ As I will explain later, the failure to separate these two shades of conflict is one of the mistakes which Maboloc has committed.

On the one hand, treating one another as antagonistic enemies actually cannibalizes pluralism by not giving different viewpoints legitimacy in expressing their difference. On the other hand, by treating each group as legitimate adversaries, an agonistic political sphere creates the conditions where pluralism flourishes because different discourses are given the chance to express their dissent against the established order. Given this distinction, Mouffe asserts that “what is important is that conflict does not take the form of ‘antagonism’ (struggle between enemies) but of ‘agonism’ (struggle between adversaries).”³⁸ In this case, a radical democratic sphere presupposes an agonistic site where channels of conflict and contestation are perpetually open through which inevitable coagulation of power relations can be disarticulated and rearticulated all in the name of liberty and equality for all.

As mentioned earlier, Mouffe’s concept of radical democracy is stimulating a vigorous discourse among political philosophers in the Philippines thanks largely to one man—Christopher Ryan Maboloc. Since 2016, when his first essay on radical democracy appeared in an opinion piece on *Inquirer.Net*,³⁹ Maboloc has tirelessly produced a set of incisive and unrelenting analyses of Philippine democracy and the politics of former

³⁶ Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 6.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy* (London: Centre for the Study of Democracy, 2002).

³⁹ See Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte,” in *Inquirer.Net* (16 December 2016), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/100042/radical-democracy-time-duterte>>.

Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte through the lens of Mouffe's radical democratic theory.⁴⁰ In the next section, I will be presenting his conception of radical politics in the Philippines before I turn to a critical engagement with it in the third section.

Maboloc on the "Radical Politics" of Rodrigo Duterte

As is well known, the Philippines is Southeast Asia's oldest democracy. But its stagnated development, which pushed it to the bottom of the Asian continent in terms of progress, has earned it the moniker the "sick man of Asia."⁴¹ In diagnosing the cause of this democratic degeneracy, Maboloc points his finger at one disease: elite politics. Elitism in politics, he says, refers to a situation wherein a privileged group—the elites—dominates and controls "the many aspects of life in the state."⁴²

How did the Philippines arrive at such a situation? Consulting historical accounts, Maboloc explains that the elites who rule Philippine politics today are descendants of past local mestizos and *ilustrados* whose loyalty was co-opted by the country's former Spanish and American colonial masters.⁴³ In handing to them the reigns of the economy and the state, the colonial masters laid the groundwork for the emergence of a "centralized" governance in which Filipino elites control the entire archipelago from the central seat of power—Manila—while the margins—the poor, the Bisaya, and Mindanao—are powerless in influencing the affairs of the nation.⁴⁴ Maboloc opines that this centralized governance has reduced nation-building in the Philippines today into a "predatory" system wherein the elites extract the country's resources and exploit the Filipinos to the hilt, driving the country into an "immature form of democracy."⁴⁵

This defective democracy is the rationale behind Maboloc's praise for radical democracy. In his mind, the stranglehold of the elites over a centralized political system has created a "politics of exclusion" in which the plural voices of the Filipinos who dwell in the peripheries are not heard.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ At present, Maboloc has produced around ten articles whose theoretical lens falls within the ambit of Mouffe's radical democratic paradigm. These essays are now collated into a book. See Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*.

⁴¹ William Pesek, "Philippines Still the 'Sickest Man' of Asia," in *Asia Times* (10 December 2021), <<https://asiatimes.com/2021/12/philippines-still-the-sickest-man-of-asia/>>. See also Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, *Contested Democracy and the Left in the Philippines after Marcos* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 50.

⁴² Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 162–163.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Ruled by a single group of self-serving decision-makers, elite politics fails to accommodate differences and plurality in the Philippines, thereby perpetuating oppression and injustice. For this reason, he argues that any type of linear or state-centric approach to governance is doomed to fail since this will simply reinforce the pre-existing, elite-dominated power structures that are so ruinous for the nation.⁴⁷ He thinks that for Philippine democracy to progress, radical means are necessitated. It is at this point where Maboloc presents his case for the necessity of radical politics in the Philippines.

Lifting an oft-quoted passage from Mouffe, Maboloc defines radical politics/democracy as “the abandonment of the concept of a perfect consensus or a harmonious collective will and the acceptance of the permanence of conflicts and antagonisms” in democratic politics.⁴⁸ Following Mouffe, he claims that radical democracy advocates opening democracy to contestation and antagonism considering its pluralistic and diverse nature.⁴⁹ We already know that, for Maboloc, this openness cannot take place under the auspices of elite politics. This is why, for him, to radicalize Philippine democracy, politics has to step outside the established norms of elite politics. In this light, radical politics favors “anti-establishment principles that seek the improvement of the society beyond normative procedures.”⁵⁰ These anti-establishment principles, which as we will see later includes using intimidation and violence, is simultaneously a form of escape from the elitist logic and a mode of dismantling the elitist structure of politics. For this reason, he thinks that radical politics signifies a revolt against the elites and the political system which they dominate.⁵¹

It is from this angle which Maboloc proclaimed Duterte as a radical politician who has radicalized Philippine democracy. For Maboloc, Duterte is radical because he veers away from the conventions of elite politics: “Duterte’s approach, it can be said, is not tied to the strict formalities of a system nor the procedural purposes of protocols. In this way, he can be considered as radical.”⁵² His point here is that Duterte does not dance to the tune of the consensual approach of liberal-elite politics. Indeed, Maboloc is highly suspicious of the deliberative or consensual model of political

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁸ Chantal Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” in *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*, ed. by Joseph Carens (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 178. Quoted in Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 136.

⁴⁹ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 186–187.

discourse which he thinks is a mere disguise for the rich and the powerful to advance their interests given that they dominate the discourse process.⁵³

Maboloc maintains that, in contrast to this, Duterte liberates politics from the fetters of formal and elitist institutional procedures. He says that Duterte does not care about consensus or compromise; rather, he thinks that Duterte recognizes conflict as the starting point of politics.⁵⁴ In Duterte's "radical politics," to borrow the words of Labastin's explication of Maboloc's ideas, "the desire for social change is expressed outside the bounds of the democratic process. Politics is radical. It is *Realpolitik*. It is violent and coercive."⁵⁵ Maboloc says that we can see this radicality in Duterte's will and courage to confront the elites. It is often noted that Duterte routinely bullied and even threatened to kill some figures he did not get along with, approaches which attracted many strong criticisms. Maboloc, on the contrary, turned this on its head by claiming that Duterte's bullish practices are not things to deplore because they are simply expressions of his "grammar of dissent" against an uncaring elitist establishment.⁵⁶ To this end, he frames Duterte as the symbol *par excellence* of the struggle of the marginalized against elite politics.⁵⁷ From the standpoint of radical politics, Maboloc avers that this gesture by Duterte entails the revival of conflict within society.⁵⁸ Thus, he proclaims, "with his aggressive and adversarial style of leadership" Duterte has effectively decentered and disarticulated political power in the country, leading to the inauguration of radical democracy.⁵⁹

Considering all this, Maboloc admits that radical politics is disruptive—it breaks away from the usual way of doing politics, and stokes conflict and division "in order to control the state and its political machinery."⁶⁰ However, this disruption is necessary given the oppression and injustice which has coalesced into the country's political institutions.⁶¹ Along these lines, he sees Duterte's radical politics as a way of shaking the foundations of society to unsettle and even destroy the roots and stems of elite politics. In radical politics, violence is not anti-democratic but serves a

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵⁵ Labastin, "Two Faces of *Dutertismo*," 50.

⁵⁶ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 36.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 168. See also Menelito Mansueto, "Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model: Duterte and Mass Media," in *Radical Politics in the Philippines: A Reader* (USA: KDP Publishing, 2022), 27–41.

⁵⁸ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 232.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

utilitarian function—it antagonizes the elites in order to protect the *demos*.⁶² Thus, Duterte’s radical politics, as he puts it, is a “new, non-linear kind of radical leadership that instills fears in the minds of many, but also embraced as a bitter pill to swallow if the country is to rise from its systemic failures.”⁶³ Indeed, for Maboloc, in order for the Philippines to graduate from its defective democracy, radical politics is non-negotiable.

Maboloc’s Non-Radical “Radical Politics”

But are Maboloc’s conclusions theoretically consistent with the radical democratic project? Is Duterte’s politics truly radical in the Mouffean sense as Maboloc vehemently proclaims? In this section, I will subject Maboloc’s arguments through a thorough critical analysis to show that his reading of Duterte’s politics as radical is theoretically disconnected from the Mouffean radical democratic framework that he claims to be using. This misappropriation of radical democracy, as I will show below, stems from errors of semantics. Upon closer inspection, I am strongly convinced that Maboloc has misinterpreted two important Mouffean terms: “radical” and “antagonism.” Let me begin my discussion by problematizing his take of the term “radical.”

As discussed in the previous section, Maboloc frames radical politics as a political approach that necessarily includes veering away from the established liberal democratic institutions of the country given how, for him, these are inextricably linked with elite politics. He is not entirely wrong here as the “capture” by the elites of the Philippines’ liberal democratic order is well documented.⁶⁴ For this reason, he thinks that Duterte’s assault against liberal values and ideals—his so-called “dictatorial tendencies”—is indicative of the latter’s radicalism.⁶⁵ In fact, he seems to argue that radicalizing Philippine democracy necessitates breaking free from liberalism altogether given that its structure is “rooted in an oppressive colonial past” and survives to this day as an elitist instrument for exploitation.⁶⁶ This suggests that for Maboloc radical politics entails a “radical break” from the institutions of liberal democracy.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18; see also Labastin, “Two Faces of Dutertismo,” 49.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁴ See Aurel Croissant and Philip Lorenz, *Comparative Politics of Southeast Asia: An Introduction to Governments and Political Regimes*, 2nd ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022); Julio C. Teehankee and Cleo Anne A. Calimbahin, “Mapping the Philippines’ Defective Democracy,” in *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 47:2 (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.2019.1702801>>.

⁶⁵ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 74–75.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 235.

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Here we see Maboloc missing the point of radical democracy. As Mouffe stated in an interview:

So the problem with liberal democratic societies—*really existing* liberal democracies—is not their ideals; their ideals are wonderful. The problem is that those ideals are not put into practice in those societies. So the question that I think radical democracy is very much about is how to force those societies to take those ideals seriously, to put them into practice.⁶⁷

Based on this alone, it is clear that Mouffe frames radical democracy always within the confines of liberal democracy. Indeed, how could this not be if its main objective is the realization of the ideals of liberal democracy?

In *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe stresses that although liberalism and democracy are two different political traditions that operate with contradictory logics, the tension between them is nevertheless crucial:

By constantly challenging the relations of inclusion-exclusion implied by the political constitution of ‘the people’—required by the exercise of democracy—the liberal discourse of universal human rights plays an important role in maintaining the democratic contestation alive. On the other side, it is only thanks to the democratic logics of equivalence that frontiers can be created and a demos established without which no real exercise of rights could be possible.⁶⁸

Thus, against Carl Schmitt who refutes the liberal conception of democratic politics,⁶⁹ Mouffe thinks that the tension between liberalism and democracy is not something that should be resolved but preserved.⁷⁰ This precarious tightrope act between liberalism and democracy—the paradox of democracy as Mouffe calls it—is vital in preserving plurality and heterogeneity in a democratic order constituted by the logic of the homogeneity of its citizens. As she further wrote:

⁶⁷ Chantal Mouffe in an interview, cited in Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson, “Rethinking Political Community: Chantal Mouffe’s Liberal Socialism,” in *JAC*, 19:2 (1999), <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20866234>>, 194.

⁶⁸ Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 10.

⁶⁹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, Expanded Edition, trans. by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 49–59.

⁷⁰ Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 9.

Once the very possibility of achieving homogeneity is discarded, the necessity of liberal institutions becomes evident. Far from being a mere cover-up for the class divisions of capitalist society, as many participatory democrats seem to believe, such institutions provide the guarantee that individual freedom will be protected against the tyranny of the majority or the domination of the totalitarian party/state.⁷¹

This shows the contradiction in Maboloc's claim that radical politics involves a "radical break" from liberalism. If we follow Mouffe's framing of radical democracy, the problem in the Philippines is not liberalism but how this has been restricted to the few. Contrary to Maboloc's claim, a radical politics in the Philippines does not include an anti-liberalism dimension no matter how defective liberal institutions are in their current form. Instead, the radical democratic challenge is how to strip off these defects so that liberalism becomes operative in the country.

This brings me to the second part of my critique. In the preface of his book, Maboloc states: "The heart of this work rests in the theory of Chantal Mouffe, who says that politics cannot be based on agreement but contestation. Radical democracy is rooted in the idea of agonism, which means that struggle is something that is inherent to politics, and not consensus."⁷² He goes on to say that this precisely makes Duterte a radical politician. He notes that Duterte's politics is not based on consensus formation since a compromise with the elites will only perpetuate injustice. Rather, he says, Duterte's aggression and refusal to compromise embodies the agonism which Mouffe was proposing.⁷³ There is some truth to Maboloc's words here. He correctly points out that in Mouffe's agonistic vision of the radical democratic sphere, struggles between "left and right wing, private and public interest, individual rights and social goods, among other things" are vital.⁷⁴ However, the question remains whether this agonistic terrain—the agon—has indeed emerged during Duterte's rule.

As explained above, conflict for Mouffe can be expressed either *antagonistically* or *agonistically* and that the task of radical democracy is to transmute potential antagonism into agonism. This means that radical democracy is not an apology for crude violence—it does not suggest that

⁷¹ Mouffe, *Return of the Political*, 104–105.

⁷² Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

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others can be eliminated or destroyed, not even the possibility that “the other side can be insulted, humiliated, ridiculed, or treated with contempt” in political engagement.⁷⁵ Agonistic conflict means that we have to preserve conflict that is defused of its destructive potential: there is still an opponent, there is still an “us” and “them,” but there is no longer the need to destroy the other.

In Maboloc’s description of Duterte’s radicalism, there is a noticeable absence of a distinction between antagonism and agonism. We can see this in the language he uses to refer to Duterte’s supposed agonistic politics. He says that Duterte’s radicalism is demonstrated by the latter’s will to destroy his enemies to advance his decisions.⁷⁶ He tells us that Duterte has succeeded in obliterating the political opposition and that he is indeed a terror to the few who threaten the majority.⁷⁷ To accentuate this point, we can again listen to Labastin who observes that Maboloc’s argument for radical politics includes coming to terms with ““undemocratic ways” to deepen and substantiate democracy” making it “violent and coercive.”⁷⁸ Note how Maboloc here frames Duterte’s purported agonistic politics in terms that precisely reflect the antagonistic conflict which Mouffe argues radical politics must avoid. Indeed, if our politics includes destroying the opposition and terrorizing the few, the radical democratic vision of a terrain where all groups can contest a centralized power in the name of liberty and equality would be lost. This seems to me that Maboloc may have conflated the two terms. It is thus ironic when he wrote: “The good thing about the President is that he does not whisk away the antagonistic nature of politics.”⁷⁹ The irony, of course, is that this precisely makes Duterte’s politics non-agonistic and thus non-radical.

I contend that a huge part of the issue is that Maboloc restricts his reading of Duterte’s politics in the latter’s supposed conflict with the elites. To be fair to him, it is indeed sound to claim that destabilizing the power of an overwhelmingly dominant group (like the elites in the Philippines) is a necessary moment in radicalizing democracy. The problem, however, with Maboloc’s reading is that it is too reductive. There are some indications that Duterte was not as anti-elite as Maboloc portrayed him to be. Indeed, while Duterte vilified some prominent oligarchs in the country, he has also coddled and formed alliances with other elites. Lisandro Claudio may be

⁷⁵ Anna Szklarska, “The Problems with Liberal Consensus: Agonistic Politics According to Chantal Mouffe,” in *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal*, 10:1 (January 2020), <<https://doi.org/10.24917/20841043.10.1.6>>, 5.

⁷⁶ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 146.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23–26.

⁷⁸ Labastin, “Two Faces of *Dutertismo*,” 50.

⁷⁹ Maboloc, *Radical Democracy in the Time of Duterte*, 63.

right when he remarked that “Duterte may talk anti-elite, but he is part of the elite.”⁸⁰ We must also put in mind that Duterte’s conflictual approach involved wielding state apparatuses to antagonize not just the elites he disliked but also other groups within civil society, such as opposing politicians, activists, journalists, leftists, and critics in general. As is well known, he and his administration often bullied and red-tagged dissidents, forcing many of them into silence.⁸¹ Some of his notable critics, like politician Leila de Lima and journalist Maria Ressa, received harsh threats from Duterte himself and were eventually arrested in what some people believe are trumped up charges.⁸² Because of his propensity of using violent language and threats to curtail dissent, the political scientist Carmel Abao thinks that Duterte introduced a “fear factor” in society where challenging him “has proven to be a great risk for the careers” and lives of dissidents.⁸³ Concomitantly, Abao observes that dissent during the Duterte regime has become minimal and ineffective.

This tells us that Duterte’s politics, contrary to Mouffe’s vision of an agonistic terrain, was not welcoming to difference and pluralism. Instead of containing conflict to maintain democratic contestation, Duterte has unleashed its full fury, wielding its antagonistic side to bludgeon and force his purported enemies into submission. Thus, against Maboloc’s claim that Duterte has decentralized power in the country, it appears to be more accurate to say that what emerged during the Duterte presidency was a centralized and monolithic power structure that was recalcitrant to dissent and conflict. This is a state of non-radicality where differing groups have

⁸⁰ Lisandro E. Claudio, *Taming People’s Power: The EDSA Revolutions and Their Contradictions* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2013), ix.

⁸¹ Data show that during the Duterte administration, from June 2016 to August 2021, nearly 4,000 individuals have been illegally arrested. Majority of these individuals have first been red-tagged either as individuals or as members of organizations which have also been red-tagged by the state. Aside from imprisonment, many who were red-tagged lived, whether real or felt, with constant surveillance and harassment which inclined them into silence. See Teo S. Marasigan, “Red-tagging as a Human Rights Violation in the Philippines,” in *New Mandela* (13 April 2022), <<https://www.newmandala.org/red-tagging-as-a-human-rights-violation-in-the-philippines/>>; Imelda Deinla, “‘Red-tagging’ and the Rule of Law in the Time of COVID-19,” in *Australian Institute of International Affairs* (1 April 2021), <<https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/red-tagging-and-the-rule-of-law-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>>.

⁸² Vince Ferreras, “TIMELINE: De Lima’s Five-year Struggle in Prison,” in *CNN Philippines* (16 March 2021), <<https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2021/3/16/TIMELINE-Leila-De-Lima-arrest-prison-.html?fb>>; “Philippines: Drop Charges Against Rappler, Editor,” in *Human Rights Watch* (30 November 2018), <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/11/30/philippines-drop-charges-against-rappler-editor>>.

⁸³ Carmel Veloso Abao, “Engaging Duterte: That Space in between Populism and Pluralism,” in *A Duterte Reader: Critical Essays on Rodrigo Duterte’s Early Presidency*, ed. by Nicole Curato (Quezon City: BUGHAW, 2017), 310.

been suppressed, silenced, or violently destroyed. A radical democratic project—along with its hallmarks of liberty, agonistic contestation, dissent, pluralism, and so on—were nowhere to be seen. In this way, Maboloc seems to advance a brand of democratic model which, in the Mouffean ambit, can never be called radical. Taking all these into consideration, I firmly argue that Maboloc's assertion that Duterte is radical and that he has radicalized Philippine democracy is a product of a conceptual misappropriation.

Conclusion

The story of philosophy is a tumultuous narrative punctuated by explosions of disagreements. Arguments, though sometimes unpleasant, allow philosophy to constantly mutate and ultimately endure throughout millennia. The ancient satirist Lucian had a simple reaction to this: damn these philosophers!⁸⁴ But without the discomfort of disagreements—had Socrates, for instance, did not disturb and unsettle the preconceived notions of ancient Athenians—(Western) philosophy as we know it would perhaps not have survived the test of time. We must not be surprised then that the philosophical landscape sometimes appears to be, in the words of one philosopher, “a gigantic dogfight, replete with barks, snarls, and the cries of the freshly nipped.”⁸⁵ This atmosphere is exactly what the debate over the supposed radical politics of Duterte currently looks like. This paper, then, is my act of jumping into the heart of this debate.

In this paper, I voiced my disagreement with Maboloc's application of Mouffe's theory of radical democracy to the politics of Rodrigo Duterte. Unfortunately, when assessed vis-à-vis Mouffe's formulation of radical democracy, Maboloc's appropriation of the same concept is plagued by a number of contradictions. First, I contended that he misinterpreted the term “radical” as a form of “radical break” from the existing liberal democratic institutions, thereby enabling him to appraise Duterte's illiberal regime as radical. This obviously contradicts Mouffe's radical democratic project which, at its core, is a struggle to realize the promise of liberal democracy in dispensing liberty and equality to all. Next, I showed that Maboloc's second error lies in the failure to demarcate between antagonism and agonism. This led him to mislabel Duterte as radical despite the antagonistic nature of the latter's practices.

In contrast to Maboloc's claims, I showed that Duterte's anti-liberal and antagonistic politics actually undercut the radicalization of democracy

⁸⁴ Robert Charles March, “The Function of Criticism in Philosophy,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* New Series, 53 (1952–1953), 135.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

envisioned by Mouffe. While Maboloc insists that Duterte's embrace of conflict is an embodiment of radicality, he has failed to discern that Duterte has actually narrowed down the space of contestation in Philippine society. Conflict during Duterte's tenure was indeed present but it appeared to flow unidirectionally from a merciless center. There was no healthy tension between opposing camps. There was Duterte monopolizing conflict, ready to lash out antagonistically at opposing viewpoints. Calling this radical, in the words of Mouffe, "does not make sense at all."⁸⁶

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⁸⁶ Imbong, Imbong, and Torres, "Chantal Mouffe on the Radical Politics of Rodrigo Duterte," 113.

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Article

Arithmomanic Education and the Metric Society: The Role of the School in the Quantification Cult

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Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the critical role of formal schooling in intensifying a metric society, i.e., a society seduced by numbers and obsessed with quantifying all facets of the social sphere. Scholars who study the phenomenon of the metric society discuss abundantly the factors that lead to this cult of quantification: confidence in the objectivity of numbers to measure everything, the need for accountability, the charm of simplicity, trust in the capacity of incentives, accessibility of data in the era of technological revolution, the yearning for more accountable and transparent societal institutions, and the influential impact of business processes and procedures in various societal domains, among other things. What is overlooked is a sustained analysis of the critical role of the pedagogical setting in the emergence of what resembles arithmomania. I argue that one of the main drivers of the rise of the arithmomanic personality is an authoritarian banking education and the modern educational disciplinary tactics, specifically the grading system. Thus, the school is not just a passive victim but an active perpetrator of the fetishism with numbers and measurement. Education is not just a casualty but is also complicit in the rise of a metric society.

Keywords: metric society, arithmomania, schooling, grading

"Number is the within of all things."
—Pythagoras

"You can't quantify it. There's no analytic to it. Just the feeling of stability in the locker room.
... There's just a settling effect that is impossible to quantify."
—Erik Spoelstra, Miami Heat Coach

What if you are just imagining that when you graduate from the school, you would graduate from grading as well? What if the school is just a lonely and lively rehearsal for more grading outside the school?

In this paper, I will discuss the critical role of formal schooling in the emergence of a metric society, i.e., a society seduced by numbers and obsessed with quantifying all facets of the social sphere. Specifically, I will argue that one of the main drivers of this quantification cult is the authoritarian banking education and the modern educational disciplinary tactics, specifically the grading system. Thus, the school is not just a passive victim but an active perpetrator of the fetishism with numbers and measurement. Education is not just a casualty; it is also complicit in the rise of a metric society.

The Metric Society

In his 2017 book, *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social*, German sociologist Steffen Mau explains that the metric society that we live in now is "a trend whereby social phenomena are increasingly measured, described and influenced by numbers."¹ The viral phenomenon goes by different but closely related terms: fetishism of numbers,² seductions of quantification,³ tyranny of metrics and metrics fixation,⁴ numerocracy,⁵

¹ Steffen Mau, *The Metric Society: On the Quantification of the Social*, trans. by Sharon Howe (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2019), 10.

² Stephen Gudeman, "The New Captains of Information," in *Anthropology Today*, 14:1 (1998), 2.

³ Sally Engle Merry, *The Seductions of Quantification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁴ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁵ Johannes Angermüller and Thed van Leeuwen, "On the Social Uses of Scientometrics: The Quantification of Academic Evaluation and the Rise of Numerocracy in Higher Education," in *Quantifying Approaches to Discourse for Social Scientists. Postdisciplinary Studies in Discourse*, ed. by Ronny Scholz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97370-8_4>.

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omnimetrics,⁶ and cult of the quantifiable.⁷ In simple terms, these scholars describe a social life fixated and obsessed with grids and graphs, likes and leverages, rankings and ratings, stars and scores. It manifests in the hysterical ratings and hyper rankings of everything from universities to medical diagnostics, from countries' creditworthiness to customer satisfaction, and from social media reputations to self-tracking one's health, moods, habits, sexual activities, and lifestyles.

For Steffen Mau, the rise of the metric society is caused by several factors: confidence in the objectivity of numbers, need for accountability, the charm of simplicity, trust in the capacity of incentives, and belief in the measurability of everything. Mau explains the role of the state and market forces in the birth of the quantification of social values. For political governance, numbers are necessary to deploy authority and to rationalize governmental functions. On the other hand, the essence of capitalist markets "derives from the use of numerical data, calculation, and standardization."⁸ But Mau also argues that in the contemporary society, we can further identify two main drivers of the quantification cult: digitalization and economization of society. The digitalization of everything brought about by technological advancements makes it easier to collect, analyze, and store large amounts of data, even from the most private spheres, including homes, habits, hobbies, and heart rates. The economization of everything brought about by neoliberal ideologies and policies demands outputs based on measurable goals and performance indicators, relegating non-economic values in the name of profitability.

The description of Jerry Muller's book *The Tyranny of Metrics* points out the problem: "Today, organizations of all kinds are ruled by the belief that the path to success is quantifying human performance, publicizing the results, and dividing up the rewards based on the numbers. But in our zeal to instill the evaluation process with scientific rigor, we've gone from measuring performance to fixating on measuring itself. The result is a tyranny of metrics that threatens the quality of our lives and most important institutions." Muller opines that the origin of the tyranny of metrics can be traced back to Victorian Britain of the late 19th century when policymakers applied market-oriented principles to organizations outside the free market such as the school with the idea that budget allocation and payment must be based on standardized measurement of student performance in terms of the

⁶ Bruno S. Frey, "Awards in the Digital World," in *International Review of Economics*, 66 (March 2019), <<http://www.doi.org/10.1007/s12232-018-0291-1>>.

⁷ Felicity Wood, "The Cult of the Quantifiable: The Fetishism of Numbers in Higher Education," in *Prometheus*, 37:1 (2021), <<https://doi.org/10.13169/prometheus.37.1.0008>>.

⁸ Mau, *The Metric Society*, 21.

basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The intensification of measurement and quantification continued during the era of Taylorist scientific management of industry starting from the early 20th century to increase efficiency and productivity by employing scientific methods in the organization of the workplace and labor procedures.⁹

In the subsequent years until the turn of the 21st century, the cult of quantification and measurement became more prevalent due to several factors.¹⁰ First is the distrust of judgment. Skepticism abounds on the subjective judgment of professionals, resulting in confidence in what is perceived as scientific, objective, and unbiased processes of quantification tools to inform decisions and policies. Second is the critique of the professions. Non-profit institutions and professions such as the government, hospitals, and schools are criticized because they lack objective standards to quantify their bottom line: competence, performance, and profitability. Third is the apotheosis of choice. Modern society puts a premium on individual choice, seeks information via numbers to inform their choices, and expects quality performance and accountability from the usual market transactions and gradually from non-profit sectors such as education and healthcare. Fourth is the cost of disease. Technological advancements have brought down the cost and price of most consumer goods, yet education and healthcare have remained relatively high. Quantifying these services is perceived to lead to greater efficiency, productivity, and cost-effectiveness. Fifth is the challenge of leadership and management amid organizational complexity. Organizational leaders confront the task of decision-making, policy-creation, and motivating people inside complex organizations with time-bound (quarterly) objectives and a hodge-podge of stakeholders with conflicting interests. Metrics is a relatively simple technique to calibrate outcomes according to objectives, gauge people's performance based on predetermined indicators, and decide on new goals and targets. Sixth is the lure of information technology. The ease and declining cost of gathering, analyzing, and distributing high volumes of data has added to the fascination with quantification and metrics as the sure path to improvement and precision.

Mau and Muller have contributed enduring concepts such as "metric society" and "tyranny of metrics" while providing brilliant analyses of the factors contributing to their rise and intensification. The following section explains the concept of "arithmomania" which is fundamentally a psychological phenomenon but can also be easily appropriated to describe the social phenomenon explored by Mau and Muller. Unsurprisingly, the

⁹ Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics*, 29ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39ff.

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term is also hinted in other fields of social sciences to describe the trend of over-quantification and the dictatorship of data.

Arithmomania

Merriam-Webster defines arithmomania as “an abnormal compulsion to count objects or actions and make mathematical calculations.” It is a psychological condition that commonly manifests in people with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). In 1895, Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, described a patient with the uncontrollable urge to count the floorboards and the steps in the staircase. Freud labeled it “obsessional arithmomania,” interpreting the counting rituals as a diversion from obsessional ideas of temptation.¹¹ In 1896, the American functional psychologist William James talked about a young man who developed a case of arithmomania and started counting droplets, spoonfuls, and seeds, among others, and keeping track of them all on a blackboard. James referred to the anxiety developed and the premonition of ensuing harm when the ritual is not followed.¹² In 1903, the French psychologist Pierre Janet observed in some individuals with OCD the perception of incompleteness as a motivation to look for symmetry and organization. Arithmetic mania, as he calls it, develops because numbers are perceived to be precise.¹³ In other words, the person with arithmomania has “a tormenting sense of dissatisfaction with their current state,” and there is that uncontrollable urge “to correct profound feelings of imperfection.”¹⁴

From the initial observations of Freud, James, and Janet at the turn of the 20th century and up to the present, arithmomania is generally understood within the bounds of psychology, particularly in cases of OCD and Tourette Syndrome. However, arithmomania also resembles the societal obsession with numbers that Mau and Muller speak about. In other words, the individual psychological condition of arithmomania is analogous with the social phenomenon of metric fixation. The most obvious similarity is the extreme emphasis on numbers, that is, the individual patient’s uncontrollable

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, “Obsessions and Phobias: Their Psychical Mechanism and Their Aetiology,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (1893–1899), trans. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 77–78.

¹² Eugene Taylor, *William James on Exceptional Mental States: The 1896 Lowell Lectures* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1984), 138–139.

¹³ Roger K. Pitman, “Janet’s Obsessions and Psychastenia: A Synopsis,” in *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 56:4 (1984), 295, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01064475>>.

¹⁴ Laura J. Summerfeldt, “Understanding and Treating Incompleteness in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder,” in *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 60:11 (November 2004), 1156, <<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20080>>.

urge to count is comparable to the society's impassioned preoccupation with quantifiable data such as university rankings, social media reputations, or economic profitability, among others. Second, the patient's indifference to the nonquantitative facets of a thing or an event is akin to the metric society's potential to disregard some non-quantified and non-quantifiable qualities of human existence such as friendship, love, values, aesthetics, well-being, recognition, and meaning making.¹⁵ Third, just as the patient oversimplifies an event by searching for symmetry and organization, the metric society reduces problematic issues into numerical indicators that may possibly lead to a limited and less nuanced interpretation of human experiences.¹⁶ Finally, the mentioned psychologists above describe the behavior of the clinical case of arithmomania as abnormal because it is not grounded on rational explanation. In a similar manner, the current obsession with measurement and supremacy of quantified data can explain irrational behaviors such as favoring measurable goals without regard for specific circumstances and consent to ethically questionable decisions such as "gaming the system."¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, the usage of the term has not been confined to psychiatry and psychoanalysis but found its way in describing psychosocial qualities in other social science disciplines. Such is the case with the rigorous and inquisitive analysis of the Russian-American sociologist and activist Pitirim Sorokin regarding the burgeoning quantitative research tools applied in psychosocial phenomena in the mid-20th century. In his 1956 book *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences*, Sorokin recognizes the value of mathematical reasoning and quantitative methods in advancing knowledge. Since time immemorial and in ancient civilizations as diverse as Egypt, Babylon, China, Greece, and Rome, quantifying and measuring certain social phenomena has been acceptable and worthwhile. Sorokin says that during those times, mathematics has rightly been called "the queen of sciences." He is disturbed, however, with what he characterizes as the present "age of *quantophrenia* and numerology" in psychosocial fields such as sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology. Sorokin declares that "[a]ccording to the metrophrenics, only the papers containing measurements and numbers are regarded as scientific papers. Each quantitative study is considered a sign of the progress of the psychosocial sciences toward an 'objective,' 'exact,' and 'mathematical' phase in their existence, toward a

¹⁵ See Frey, "Awards in the Digital World."

¹⁶ See Alexandre Asselineau, Gilles Grolleau, and Naoufel Mzoughi, "A Good Servant but a Poor Master: The Side Effects of Numbers and Metrics," in *Administration & Society*, 54:5 (2022), 971–991, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997211043830>>.

¹⁷ See Margit Osterloh and Bruno S. Frey, "Ranking Games," in *Evaluation Review*, 39:1 (2014), 1–28, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X14524957>>.

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maturity approaching that of the physical sciences.”¹⁸ Sorokin alerts the scholarship world about the misuse and abuse of metrics betraying genuine mathematics, claiming that “under these conditions, use of mathematical method becomes a mere *quantophrenic* preoccupation having nothing in common with mathematics and giving no cognition of the psychosocial world.”¹⁹

Another early attempt to release from the boundary of psychology the descriptive usage of psychological terms closely related to arithmomania is in a 1971 economics book titled *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* by the Romanian mathematician and economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. Here, he differentiates between arithmomorphic and dialectic concepts. Concepts such as “some,” “all,” “square,” “circle,” “proton,” and “electron” are arithmomorphic because, just like numbers, they do not overlap. Following the law of contradiction, they are logically distinct from each other. Because of this discretely restrictive property, arithmomorphic concepts are valuable in computing, syllogizing, and formulating theoretical science.

Meanwhile, there are also dialectic concepts such as “democracy,” “goodness,” “justice,” “wants,” and even “life.” They do not have discrete boundaries; thus, they overlap with their opposites. A society can be both democratic and nondemocratic. A virus lies somewhere in between life and non-life. A person can be both young and old. Justice is claimed by both the perpetrator and the victim. In other words, violating the law of contradiction, A can be both A and not-A.²⁰

For Georgescu-Roegen, both arithmomorphic and dialectic concepts are valuable to science. He disagrees with many social scientists who reject dialectic concepts and perceive these as a nuisance in scientific thinking.²¹ Arithmomania, then, is an attitude of extreme confidence in the power of arithmomorphic concepts among many social scientists in general and economists in particular. Sebastian Berger calls this the “over-mathematization of economics,” blinding the economists to qualitative changes.²² From this insight, Georgescu-Roegen, as early as 1971, was already

¹⁸ Pitirim Sorokin, *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology and Related Sciences* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956/1965), 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁰ Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (USA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 45–46.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²² Sebastian Berger, “Poetic Economics and Experiential Knowledge, or How the Economist K. William Kapp Was Inspired by the Poet Ernst Wiechert,” in *Journal of Economic Issues*, 49:3 (2015), 733, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2015.1071979>>.

critical of reducing into numbers (i.e., income *per capita*) the dialectic concept of economic development.²³

From sociologist Sorokin's and economist Georgescu-Roegen's anti-positivist posture, deploying the notion of arithmomania in education is no longer far-fetched. If there is a social unit where this concept can be equally appropriate and valuable, then it is the educational institution. As far as I know, the first usage of the term "arithmomania" in educational issues is Robert Giacalone's 2009 article that laments the proliferation of academic ranking. He calls the school's version of arithmomania the fetishism for journal and school ranking. He blames this fetishism on a distorted mindset "where numbers become the sole proxy for good institutions and good work" and "driven by the desire for things like power and influence, self-importance, materialistic acquisitiveness, and servitude to financial interests."²⁴ In 2010, Henderikus Stam's editorial for the journal *Theory & Psychology* considered arithmomania as one of the pressing issues confronted by academic journals, including their own. He mentions specifically the premium given to citations and impact factors, the resistance that their journal had done, and the dream of a future "when counting is replaced by a more reflective analysis."²⁵ Closely related to Giacalone and Stam's usage is the term's appearance in a 2021 webinar presentation sponsored by Elsevier, a giant multinational publishing company. Situating it in the context of predatory publishing caused by the rise of a culture of performance management, incentive systems, and the digitalization of almost everything, Mouton and Nieker describe arithmomania this way:

Academic performance or success is now regularly equated with some score or a metric. And perhaps more specifically—metrics that privilege counts, outputs, and numbers. Qualitative aspects of academic work—which by definition cannot be reduced to simple measures such as publication counts, h-indices of journal impact factors—are conveniently ignored. We are typically not asked—in our universities—to report on our contribution to scholarship, practice, or policy, the relevance of our work for society, or whether our

²³ Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*, 52.

²⁴ Robert Giacalone, "Academic Rankings in Research Institutions: A Case of Skewed Mind-Sets and Professional Amnesia," in *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 8:1 (2009), 123, <<https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2009.37012186>>.

²⁵ Henderikus J. Stam, "Theoretical Communities and *Theory & Psychology*: A Decade Review," in *Theory & Psychology*, 20:6 (2010), 727, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354310391871>>.

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research is interesting and attractive to emerging scholars. Only: how many articles we have published in the past year and how many subsidy-bearing outputs we have produced.²⁶

In connection to my discussion of the metric society earlier, educational scholars such as Giacalone, Stam, Mouton, and Niekerk understand the academic version of arithmomania as an offshoot of the quantification of the social world. Education is just one among the many victims of the tyranny of metrics. I will not disagree with this insight. However, I will further argue that arithmomania has already been in the educational space even before the rise of the metric society. Arithmomania is a necessary outgrowth of a banking education described by the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire and the modern educational disciplinary tactics described by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. It is the arithmomanic personality produced by the school that is one of the main engines of the metric society.

The Rise of the Arithmomanic Educatee

When children walk into the premises of the school for the first time, they are free and spontaneous human beings. They anticipate new experiences and adventures. They are enthusiastic about meeting people. They want to talk, to shout, to laugh, to jump, to dance, to run, to climb, to play. Children are full of curiosity and wonder.²⁷ They are armed with questions and are excited about diverse answers.²⁸ The prominent scholar on human learning, Peter Jarvis, says, “[l]earning is the driving force that combines with our bodily drives to make us what we are—we are learned beings.”²⁹ Indeed, learning is a fundamental impulse of a child.

Children do not think first about an impending competition for ranking with their seatmates. Their minds are not preoccupied with grades,

²⁶ Johann Mouton and Marthie van Niekerk, “Predatory Publishing: Concepts, Causes and Consequences” (7 April 2021), available from <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/Documents/Lecture%20Articles/Mouton_Van%20Niekerk_Predatory%20publishing_Concept,%20issues%20and%20consequences_April%202021.pdf>.

²⁷ “Children come to school *curious*; within a few years most of that curiosity is dead, or at least silent.” John Holt, *How Children Fail* (USA: Penguin Education, 1964/1982), 160.

²⁸ “...even infants are active meaning-makers. By the time a child toddles into a classroom, he is already buzzing with beliefs and ideas and questions.” Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and “Tougher Standards”* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 152.

²⁹ Peter Jarvis, *Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Human Learning: Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2006), xi.

medals, or honors and stars. Competition can never be their initial default. The drive to compete is not innate but learned by the child. Reflecting on the culture of winning in America, Thomas Tutko and William Bruns affirm that “[c]ompetition is a learned phenomenon...people are not born with a motivation to win or to be competitive...the will to win comes through training and the influences of one’s family and environment.”³⁰ Alfie Kohn, a prolific author and critic of traditional education and parenting practices, complements this view by stressing the role of education in the competitive mindset. He asserts that “[t]he message that competition is appropriate, desirable, required, and even unavoidable is drummed into us from nursery school to graduate school; it is the subtext of every lesson.”³¹

But soon enough—or even as early as the first moment the child sets foot on the premises of the school or the classroom—the child senses a stark contrast between her fundamental impulse and the formal pulse exuded by the new environment. It would do us well to recall how Paulo Freire describes the traditional classroom as suffering from narration sickness while operating in a pedagogical atmosphere analogous to bank operations.³² This educational setting is justifiably comparable to a bank transaction because the teacher narrates and deposits lifeless knowledge to a supposed empty and passive mind of the educatee and withdraws this deposited knowledge (via assessment in the form of tests and examinations) from a robotized mind that has become analogous to an automated teller machine. In this set-up, knowledge is unquestioned and school-based without any relation to the educatee’s concrete life experiences.³³ Learning is routinized, ritualistic, and rule-based. It is a dehumanizing pedagogical ploy where the educatees become mere objects of a teacher who is the Subject of knowledge. Rather than a space for freedom and a practice for democracy, traditional education becomes a locus of authoritarianism and a rehearsal for domestication.³⁴

Still relevant is the account of Michel Foucault regarding the educational space operating as “a machine for supervising, hierarchizing,

³⁰ Thomas Tutko and William Bruns, *Winning Is Everything and Other American Myths* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), quoted in Alfie Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986/1992), 25.

³¹ Kohn, *No Contest*, 25.

³² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970/2005), 71.

³³ “The things children talk about in class, when they are allowed to talk at all, are seldom close to their hearts.” Holt, *How Children Fail*, 142.

³⁴ Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 113–114.

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rewarding.”³⁵ In his groundbreaking investigation, Foucault enlightens us on the deployment of power in modern societies, the formation of subjectivity as an effect of various power relations, and the normalization of these power relations. He shows that these power dynamics are evident in modern institutions such as prisons, hospitals, asylum, judicial courts, military, factories, and of course, schools. He argues that power is united with knowledge, thus coining the hyphenated term “power-knowledge,” allowing the wielders of power to classify and regulate not by coercion but by persuasion, not by force, but by voluntary submission.³⁶ With its disciplinary tactics, the school, indeed, is a site for ready subjugation and subtle coercion.

Initially, the child is culture-shocked in the banking classroom, which is essentially a disciplinary machine, antithetical to their fundamental curiosity and playfulness. Expectation does not coincide with reality—narration clashes with inquisitiveness. Disciplinary gaze conflicts with spontaneity. The child thought she could question, but she was taught just to answer questions. She thought she could run and play, but she was taught to sit and stay. She thought she could speak her mind but was taught to repeat or copy her teacher’s mind. Initially, the child will react with annoyance and resistance.³⁷ Such a child is not used to being regulated and managed. Resistance is the fundamental impulse of a bored mind—a desire to escape from the classroom, a tendency to daydream, a recourse to disruption and misbehavior, and a disposition to passivity and avoidance.³⁸ There is, thus, an initial and unavoidable tension between a spirit that is playful, curious, and free AND an institution that demands control of the body and discipline of the soul.³⁹

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977/1995), 147.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ “Resistance is likely to appear in classrooms where academic subject-matter knowledge is emphasized by the teacher and a recitation style is typical of classroom language interaction.” Bracha Alpert, “Students’ Resistance in the Classroom,” in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 22:4 (1991), 351, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195659>>.

³⁸ “Boredom instigates a desire to escape from the situation. In school settings, this could be manifested as daydreaming or disruption. The function of boredom, then, is to pull one’s attention from the activity perceived as unrewarding and lacking value. This reduces cognitive focus by directing attention to something more rewarding through distraction, or daydreaming, or misbehavior. The students’ motivation is avoidance or passivity.” Gayle L. Macklem, *Boredom in the Classroom: Addressing Student Motivation, Self-Regulation, and Engagement in Learning* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2015), 29.

³⁹ “In becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge. It is...a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits” Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 155.

At this initial moment of boredom manifesting as resistance, defiance, and abnormality, the teacher asserts and flexes their authority in the name of order and discipline, classroom management and control, socialization, and normalization.⁴⁰ Immature minds must be schooled and trained. Wild bodies must be tamed and restrained.⁴¹ Pupils must keep quiet, focused on the lessons, obedient to the commands, slow to speak, committed to listening, primed to answer questions, and not imprudent to question answers. A culture of silence is nurtured.⁴² A culture of voice is negated.⁴³ Obviously, in this situation, both the educator and the educatee confuse authority with authoritarianism. Banking education gives rise to the authoritarian educator. Or, more accurately, authoritarianism goes hand in hand with banking education.⁴⁴ The child will soon be extinguished and replaced by a normalized body and mind. To be different, which is the original posture of normalcy for the child, is to be abnormal or deviant in the introduced regime of school discipline.

The authoritarian banking educator has many disciplinary mechanisms at their disposal: the supervision of space through enclosure, partitioning, ranking, and hierarchizing; the control of time through strict timetables; and the regulation of the body through detailed and defined gestures, among other things.⁴⁵ Inarguably, one of the most potent apparatuses of classroom management and control has come in the form of a letter or a number: the grade.⁴⁶ The ubiquity of the grades in educational settings cannot be overstressed, so it is almost impossible to imagine the act of teaching and learning without the action of grading, further attaching a sense of moral duty to this act. If the sun is the center of the solar system, the

⁴⁰ "A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency." *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴¹ "To modern educators, the child appears as the primitive embodiment of the good and the natural—the noble savage, if you will. Children are spontaneous and joyful, unpredictable and trusting—traits to be cherished but sadly evanescent in the path toward maturity ... For all its nobility, the noble savage remains savage, and integration into the world of adults requires regimentation." Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1976/2011), 38.

⁴² Paulo Freire, "Cultural Action and Conscientization," in *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*, trans. by Donaldo Macedo (Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1985), 72.

⁴³ Barrie Thorne, "From Silence to Voice: Bringing Children More Fully into Knowledge," in *Childhood*, 9:3 (2002), 253, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/090756820009003604>>.

⁴⁴ Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (London: MacMillan, 1987), 46.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 141ff.

⁴⁶ "The 'invention' of this new political anatomy must not be seen as a sudden discovery ... On almost every occasion, they were adopted in response to particular needs..." *Ibid.*, 138.

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grade is the heart of the school system. In an enticing article, Pat Belanoff claims that “[g]rades and schools seem synonymous...Many in our society and in the schools accept without question these connections between grades and the quality of student learning.”⁴⁷

The grade must not be dismissed easily as a passive number, mere abstraction, or an innocent indicator; “[a]s a single symbol, each grade carries considerably more information than it can deliver or convey.”⁴⁸ It is deemed to be a summary of one’s school life. It is “an activity in which complex performances and practices are coded into a single variable.”⁴⁹ The grade is perceived to be a determinant of the value of an educatee’s performance. A poor grade means that the student did not study, lack interest in the subject, or are inferior academically. Conversely, a good grade attests to the student’s industriousness, interest, attentiveness, and intelligence. Either the fear of underperforming or the grandeur of excelling consumes the consciousness of the educatee.⁵⁰ Both the inane and the intelligent feel the reckoning and acknowledge the judgment signified by the grade. The verdict is momentary, but the impression may be enduring and stable. High marks boost self-esteem—an assurance of advantage in the struggle for classroom recognition and beyond. Conversely, low or failing grades leave marks beyond classroom walls and into the distant future, carving one’s destiny or even leaving some fatalities, usually in the form of suicide and school shootings. That is why a grade can shape identity, and an educatee may find their identity in their grade. “It is an act of creation of certain types of subjectivities.”⁵¹ Inasmuch as grades bring thrills and triumphs, it may also mean troubles and tribulations.

⁴⁷ Pat Belanoff, “What Is a Grade?,” in *The Subject Is Writing: Essays by Students and Teachers*, 2nd ed., ed. by Wendy Bishop (New Hampshire: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1999), 147.

⁴⁸ Kathleen Blake Yancey and Brian Huot, “Construction, Deconstruction, and (Over) Determination: A Foucaultian Analysis of Grades,” in *The Theory and Practice of Grading Writing Problems and Possibilities*, ed. by Frances Zak and Christopher C. Weaver (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁵⁰ Keen readers may retort that this is an exaggerated bifurcation. Grade obsession may not necessarily be the temperament of the ordinary contemporary student. As this paper’s reviewer pointed out, there has been a growing tendency towards mediocrity among many students today—“just passing and getting grades that are good enough.” This attitude of mediocrity appears to negate this paper’s main claim about grade fixation. Granting its truth, however, mediocrity may still relate incidentally to grade fixation. It can be considered a coping mechanism against the anxiety linked with fixation. Mediocrity, like cynicism and apathy, may still be possible outcomes of a grade-centric environment. Admittedly, this needs a standalone in-depth study.

⁵¹ Spyros Themelis, ed., *Critical Reflections on the Language of Neoliberalism in Education: Dangerous Words and Discourses of Possibilities* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 9.

The grade is an external motivator—either as a reward or a punishment, a bribe, or a threat. Several decades ago, the American democratic educator John Dewey had already spoken about the direct connection between the delivery of a dull classroom topic and the recourse to external motivators such as grading. Dewey observes:

...[i]f there is not an inherent attracting power in the material, then...the teacher will either attempt to surround the material with foreign attractiveness, making a bid or offering a bribe for attention by ‘making the lesson interesting’; or else will resort to counterirritants (low marks, threats of non-promotion, staying after school, personal disapprobation, expressed in a great variety of ways, naggings, continuous calling upon the child to “pay attention,” etc.)...But the attention thus gained...always remains dependent upon something external...⁵²

Many years later, the American educational anthropologist Susan Blum comments about grading as both an incentive and a deterrent. She asserts that “[g]rades are the quintessential form of extrinsic motivation: they reward for accomplishment. But they are also threats: if you don’t comply in every way, no matter how you feel about anything, you will be de-throned.”⁵³ Be an obedient imitator of the teacher, and you will get a high grade. Be an obstinate rebel of the system, and you will get a low or failing grade. In the minds of young educatees, the grade has become the ultimate carrot and stick.

The grade generates and accentuates classroom hierarchy, widening the gulf between the educator and the educatees.⁵⁴ The grade-giver—the teacher—is at the top. The graded—the educatee—is always below the grade-giver. When this is shaken deliberately (through a disrespectful behavior maybe) or accidentally (through an inquisitive question probably), the educatees are at once reminded—bluntly or subtly—of who the final grade-giver is. Grading situates the grade-giver in a strategic and advantageous position. The grade does not only signify the authority of the teacher. It also

⁵² John Dewey, *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 148.

⁵³ Susan D. Blum, “Just One Change (Just Kidding): Ungrading and Its Necessary Accompaniments,” in *UNgrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, ed. by Susan D. Blum (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020), 56.

⁵⁴ Yancey and Huot, “Construction, Deconstruction, and (Over) Determination,” 44.

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stresses their authoritative proficiency—the specialist in knowledge, the expert in labeling and classifying, categorization, and segmentation.⁵⁵ The “power dynamic in the classroom”⁵⁶ certainly takes the form of Foucauldian power-knowledge. In their analysis of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, this is how Meghan Kallman and Rachele Dini explain power-knowledge as applied in the dispensation of grade to educatees:

Foucault describes how the techniques of power depend on an “understanding” of their target. To control something or someone, one must have “knowledge” of it. “Understanding” and “knowledge” here mean classifying the individual into one of several possible slots. For example, schools and universities keep transcripts of students’ grades. In the act of doing so, they are classifying young people as “A,” “B,” or “C” students and thus creating “knowledge” about the kind of individual each student is. Instead of contesting a “B” grade, and hence the university’s classification of them, a student may work harder to earn an “A” grade. In this way, the school or university exercises power over the student. Power and knowledge, then, are profoundly interrelated and depend on each other.⁵⁷

But the hierarchical divide caused by grading is not just binary—between the educator and the educatees. Rather, it resembles a stepped pyramid with multiple steps crisscrossing among the educatees themselves. Whole numbers become trivial distinctions, while decimal points become extremely meaningful to justify the ranking from number 1 to number 50. Valedictorian, salutatorian, summa cum laude, magna cum laude, best in Math, best in Science, row 4, row 1, section 2, section 21, novice, apprentice, proficient, outstanding. And who does not want to be in the upper chamber of the pyramid? Who does not fear to be relegated to the base? Bitterness and

⁵⁵ The educator is also often called a faculty member. Online Etymology Dictionary says that “faculty” is from the Latin word *facultas*, which means “power” and “capability.” Eventually, it pertains to an “ability in knowledge,” leading to its connotation as a “body of persons on whom are conferred specific professional powers.” Thus, the faculty is an embodiment of power-knowledge.

⁵⁶ Alfie Kohn, “Foreword,” in *UnGrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, ed. by Susan D. Blum (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020), xvii.

⁵⁷ Meghan Kallman and Rachele Dini, *An Analysis of Michele Foucault’s Discipline and Punish* (London: Routledge, 2017), 31.

envy become intense. Anxiety and self-doubt become commonplace. Competition and rivalry become systemic. One student is unsatisfied with a high grade after finding that others' grades are higher. Another one does not mind a low grade for as long as that of others are lower. Kohn's criticism about standardized testing might also extend to the resultant grading:

First, these tests contribute to the already pathological competitiveness of our culture, which leads us to regard others as obstacles to our own success—with all the suspicion, envy, self-doubt, and hostility that rivalry entails. The process of assigning children to percentiles helps to ensure that schooling is more about triumphing over everyone else than about learning.⁵⁸

If the school is predominantly an ideological state apparatus and secondarily a repressive state apparatus, following the French Marxist Louis Althusser,⁵⁹ we can further describe the school grade as “an apparatus within an apparatus” and, thus, properly be called primarily an ideological school apparatus and secondarily a repressive school apparatus. Laura Gibbs, another critic of grading, explains the coercive nature of grade-giving:

While grades aspire to be a form of feedback, the main function of grading is coercion, the opposite of freedom. We use grades to make students do things that we want them to do. We may have good intentions with our students' interests in mind, but that does not change the fact that we are using grades as a form of control.⁶⁰

And so, the grade urges obedience, silences the noisy, and domesticates the wild. The authoritarian banking educator is respected out of fear, recognized out of trepidation, and obeyed out of anxiety. The violence of the gunpoint (repressive state apparatus) is not so distinct from the violence of the grade-point (repressive school apparatus). Ira Shor, the well-known American critical educator, talks about his experience with his educatees at the college level:

⁵⁸ Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, 187–188.

⁵⁹ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 155ff.

⁶⁰ Laura Gibbs, “Let's Talk about Grading,” in *UNgrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, ed. by Susan D. Blum (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020), 95.

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If they speak, they will fashion their words inside the vocabulary of the teacher's politics. When they write papers, they also try to copy the teacher's ideology to get a good grade... These educatees begin expecting lower grades for disagreeing with the teacher, or put another way, they "get by" through agreeing with the boss, the teacher.⁶¹

More interesting still is the grade's predominant function as an ideological school apparatus molding the educatee's perceptions, values, attitudes, and conduct to conform to the school's standard of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable, normal and abnormal. Comply so that you will succeed: conformism. Look for yourself only because others look for themselves alone: excessive individualism. The winner earns it through their intelligence, talent, and hard work: meritocratic feeling. The notion of a hidden curriculum will perfectly complement our claim here that the grade functions even more effectively at the level of ideology. The Canadian critical educator Henry Giroux describes the hidden curriculum as "those unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying structure of schooling, as opposed to the formally recognized and sanctioned dimensions of the schooling experience."⁶² In other words, the official curriculum is the explicit text, while the hidden curriculum is the subtext. The official curriculum is on the surface, while the hidden curriculum is on the undercurrent. Some themes are taught effectively by teachers even if they do not deliberately and explicitly teach them. There are values that students effectively learn simply by being graded, even if they do not consciously study and desire to learn them. Giroux rightly argues that "what students learn in school is determined more from the hidden curriculum than from the official curriculum."⁶³

And so, this sustained discussion endeavors to show that an arithmomanic personality is fundamentally raised and formed in the school, specifically in a traditional authoritarian banking educational space with its perpetual disciplinary gaze positioned and perfected through the grade. The educatee realizes that life in the school revolves around the sacred number. Everybody looks up to it. Educatees always need to count and be accountable.

⁶¹ Freire and Shor, *Pedagogy for Liberation*, 183–184.

⁶² Henry Giroux, "Developing Educational Programs: Overcoming the Hidden Curriculum," *The Clearing House*, 52:4 (December 1978), 148, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30185121>>.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 148.

Everything must be accomplished for the grade. Everything that is accomplished must be graded. “Is that included in the test?” “Is it graded?” “Why am I just getting this grade?” “Why is she higher than me?” “Does teacher A give high grades?” “Does teacher B flunk students?” “Pay attention.” “Do the assigned readings.” “Take note of everything the teacher says.” “Memorize all these for the test.”

The overpowering efficiency of the grade as a disciplinary tactic leads students to become obsessed with the grade—a manic reaction to high grade and a phobic reaction to low grade. Phobia is just another side of mania. The latter avoids the object of fear while paradoxically attending to it; the former is fixated on the object of desire. It is not by accident that Freud analyzed obsessions side by side with phobias.⁶⁴ Whether it is phobic or manic, the compulsion is to count the graded achievements and to compute the achieved grades. Starr Sackstein, an advocate and practitioner of ungrading, states that

[at] some point in elementary school—or some may argue when systems start to test—the shift away from sheer curiosity to an obsession with knowing the numbers begins. Whether it is the parental influence, the teacher control, or the student’s drive to be perfect, students seek the elusive perfect score as it is the only way they can feel successful.⁶⁵

Just as how Foucault meticulously explains the efficiency and effectiveness of modern penitentiary innovations and military trainings to create the disciplined subject, the tactic of grading is so efficient and effective in forming docile minds and bodies.⁶⁶ The soldier ultimately self-regulates by standing, walking, and talking the way he was trained and disciplined according to the army’s norms.⁶⁷ The graduate ultimately self-regulates and self-monitors by bowing to measurement and joining the quantification cult the way they were trained and disciplined according to the school’s valuing of the grade. It will not be surprising that any move to ungrade or to imagine a non-traditional way of assessment will be met with skepticism, ridicule, or resistance from all corners—from administrators and teachers, from students and parents, from the media and the netizens. Indeed, a disciplinary

⁶⁴ See Freud, “Obsessions and Phobias.”

⁶⁵ Starr Sackstein, “Shifting the Grading Mindset,” in *UnGrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and What to Do Instead)*, ed. by Susan D. Blum (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020), 77.

⁶⁶ “Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.” Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

⁶⁷ Kallman and Dini, *Analysis of Foucault’s Discipline and Punish*, 31.

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mechanism does not only generate a willing, happy, and obedient subject. More interestingly, it produces its believer and advocate who defends its fairness and reasonability. Maybe this is how we can further extend the idea that Foucault conveys in the following passage: “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes.”⁶⁸ Indeed, the arithmomanic mind is now fully trained to be productive and to participate in the metric society, which is one of the by-products and engines of the contemporary configuration of capitalism.

Final Remarks

Two things must be clarified to conclude this exploration. First, I do not claim a simplistic, smooth, stable, and unilinear movement from school life to societal roles. With Foucault, I maintain that power relations are so complex that one must always consider antagonisms and particularities, thresholds and ruptures, overlaps and discontinuities. Inspired by the brilliant analysis of Mau, Muller, and the theorists of metric society, I emphasize that the social world is multifaceted, and any attempt to absolutize one factor in the pervasiveness of number fetishism will miss the point of valuable theorizing. This critical exploration, therefore, is a modest contribution and supplement to the ongoing theorizing about the quantification cult.

Second, I don't commit numbers to the fire. The world stops functioning effectively without measurement. Quantification is valuable and necessary. Sorokin states, “[a]lready in ancient Egypt, Babylonia, India, China, and Pythagorean Greece, the logical elegance of mathematical thought and its fruitfulness in the analysis of empirical phenomena were fully acknowledged.”⁶⁹ Muller maintains that “there are settings in which metrics, in its various forms, works well,”⁷⁰ and the crucial part is “knowing how much weight to give to metrics, recognizing their characteristic distortions, and appreciating what can't be measured.”⁷¹ Gilles Paquet reiterates that “there is nothing inherently wrong about quantifying anything that can meaningfully be quantified.”⁷² Using the language of critical theory tradition, Mau affirms that quantification can have emancipatory potential.⁷³ In the

⁶⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 183.

⁶⁹ Sorokin, *Fads and Foibles in Modern Sociology*, 102.

⁷⁰ Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics*, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁷² Gilles Paquet, “Quantophrenia,” in *Optimum Online*, 39:1 (2009), 20.

⁷³ Mau, *The Metric Society*, 17.

issue of school grading, assessment of knowledge and learning gained by educatees is not only essential but also fair and just. But there can be assessment without grading⁷⁴ and “we must now strive for a new biodiversity of assessments.”⁷⁵ This is a topic, of course, that must be taken seriously in a separate study.

The problem is that our society has, David Shaywitz writes, “taken a tool, an approach, a mindset...and started to apply it almost indiscriminately, with a near-religious fervor.”⁷⁶ The issue, according to Kenneth Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, is that we “...become so fixated on the data, and so obsessed with the power and promise it offers, that we fail to appreciate its inherent ability to mislead.”⁷⁷ And so, we are concerned about the authoritarian banking educators deploying the grade as the ultimate carrot and stick, the classroom becoming a space for competition at the expense of cooperative living, young minds rehearsing for hierarchy and order at the cost of heterogeneity and disruption, a populace forgetting that the most valuable things in education are those that escape grading and measurement. We are concerned about a banking pedagogy and its inherent accessory—the authoritarian educator and its “perpetual penalty.” For the obsession with quantification is also driven and intensified by oppressive and domesticating classrooms, creating docile minds and bodies that are mystified by numbers and fueled by quantophreniac zeal yet unable to make sense of the interests, values, and normativities inherent in the dictatorship of data and misappropriation of measurement.

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⁷⁴ Assessment of learning without necessarily grading the learners is not a novel idea in educational research and practice. For some examples, see the following: Susan D. Blum, ed., *UNgrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2020); Alfie Kohn, “From Degrading to De-Grading,” in *High School Magazine*, 6, no. 5 (March 1999): 38–43, <<https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/degrading-de-grading>>; Stephanie S. Erickson, “The Game of Grades and the Hidden Curriculum,” in *The Physics Teacher*, 60, no. 5 (2022), 398–399, <<https://doi.org/10.1119/10.0010403>>.

⁷⁵ Ghislain Deslandes, “A Critique of the Tyranny of Metrics and Figures,” in *The Choice* (18 March 18 2021), <<https://thechoice.escp.eu/tl-dr/a-critique-of-the-tyranny-of-metrics-and-figures>>.

⁷⁶ David Shaywitz, “We Are Not a Dashboard: Contesting the Tyranny of Metrics, Measurement, and Managerialism,” in *Forbes* (24 December 2018), <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidshaywitz/2018/12/24/we-are-not-a-dashboard-contesting-the-tyranny-of-metrics-measurement-and-managerialism/?sh=510d6a63315b>>.

⁷⁷ Kenneth Cukier and Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, “The Dictatorship of Data,” in *MIT Review* (31 May 2013), <<https://www.technologyreview.com/2013/05/31/178263/the-dictatorship-of-data>>.

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Article

Perception, *Phantasie*, Signification: The Ambiguous Status of Imagination in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*

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Abstract: Classical western metaphysics has, since Plato, been suspicious of the role and place of imagination in philosophy. This suspicion has not only generated conceptions of it being “whimsical” and, at times, “dangerous,” but has rendered its place in philosophy ambiguous and narrowly confined to a so-called “reproductive form or function.” With this background in mind, I demonstrate that Husserl, in the *Logical Investigations*, appears to have toed the line as regards philosophy tending to segregate imagination and thought as, on the one hand, evinced in his legitimation of imagination by elevating it to an intentional modality on par with perception and signification, and on the other, as an offshoot of perception. I argue further that whilst Husserl's imagination in *Logical Investigations* is clouded by an ambiguity, he articulates in *Ideas I* a strand of imagination central to apprehending essences such that, notwithstanding the ambiguity clouding his concept of imagination, there is to be seen in Husserl an increasing recognition of imagination's role in philosophy.

Keywords: *phantasie*, perception, signification, ambiguity

Classical Western metaphysics has been skeptical of imagination's role and place in philosophy. John Sallis, in his book *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, argues that this skepticism is evident in Plato, Aristotle, Pico, and Kant.¹ This suspicion has not only led

¹ John Sallis, *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), particularly Chapter 1. The allusion to Sallis's account is important in that it situates within a broader context the problematic I am here inquiring into. See also Mark Raftery-Skehan, “An Imagination Reductive or Reproductive of the Sign? The

to the development of conceptions that view imagination as “whimsical” and “dangerous,”² but has rendered its place in philosophy ambiguous and narrowly confined to a so-called “reproductive form or function.”³ Keeping this point in mind, I demonstrate that the same historical ambiguity reappears in Husserl’s analysis of phantasy in *Logical Investigations (LI)*.⁴ I argue that an ambiguity leading to a tension or conflict in Husserl’s theory of imagination consists in, on the one hand, his legitimation of imagination in *LI II* by treating it as an intentional act on an equal footing with perception and signification, and on the other, in his delegitimation of phantasy by conforming to the classical tendency to segregate imagination and signification, and to regard it as an offshoot of perception. In so doing, Husserl aligns imagination with perception at the expense of developing its relation to signification, hence Husserl’s negative valuation of imagination. I argue further that an

Possibility of Signification in Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen* and Derrida’s *La voix et le phénomène*” (Unpublished manuscript, May 2019. Mark Raftery-Skehan has generously shared with me this yet unpublished manuscript in May 2019. I was the first external reader to have read the earlier version of the unpublished manuscript in question); Eva T.H. Brann, *The World of Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1991); Maria Manuela Saraiva, *L’imagination selon Husserl* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern and Postmodern* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998); Saulius Geniusas, *Phenomenology of Productive Imagination: Embodiment, Language, Subjectivity* (Hanover: Ibidem Press, 2022); Thomas Gould, “Plato’s Hostility to Art,” in *A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 3:1 (Spring, 1964), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20162893>>; Dieter Lohmar, “The Function of Weak Phantasy in Perception and Thinking,” in *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, ed. by D. Schmicking and S. Gallagher (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010); Julia Jansen, “Phenomenology, Imagination and Interdisciplinary Research,” in *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, ed. by D. Schmicking and S. Gallagher (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010); Leslie Stevenson, “Twelve Conceptions of Imagination,” in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 43:3 (July 2003); James Morley, “Introduction: Phenomenology of Imagination,” in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 4 (2005). In two forthcoming articles, I have analyzed at length this status of phantasy in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Pico, and Kant. See Mark Antony Jalalum, “Phantasy: Un-Necessary Mediator,” in *Kinaadman Journal* (forthcoming) and Mark Antony Jalalum, “Re-Imagining Imagination: Revisiting Plato’s *Eikasia* and Aristotle’s *Phantasia*” in *Lumina Journal* (forthcoming).

² Plato argues that imagination (phantastic imagination) is detrimental to the education of *Nomophylakes*. In a not-so-distant past, one could think, of Nikos Kazantzakis’s *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and the mixed reception it has received.

³ Cf. Ricoeur’s “Imagination in Discourse and in Action” in *From Text to Action*. See also Saulius Geniusas, *Phenomenology of Productive Imagination: Embodiment, Language, Subjectivity* (Hanover: Ibidem Press, 2022), particularly, Chapters 1 and 2, respectively. For a further discussion on reproductive form of imagination in Husserl, see Saulius Geniusas “What is Productive Imagination? The Hidden Resources of Husserl’s Phenomenology of Phantasy,” in *The Subject(s) of Phenomenology, Contributions to Phenomenology*, ed. by Iulian Apostolescu (Cham: Springer Cham, 2020). Geniusas argues, among others, that productive imagination is a relative term—something that is (only) understood when juxtaposed or compare with *reproductive Phantasia*.

⁴ I will interchangeably use *Phantasie*, phantasy, and imagination.

ambiguity obscuring Husserl's imagination theory is very much a function of it as a theoretical mediation or it theoretically mediating between perception and signification.⁵ By recognizing the structure of *Phantasie* as an intentional modality, Husserl demonstrates that imagination is no less an intentional act directed towards its object for not having an object that exists empirically, as in the case of perception. With the recognition of *Phantasie*, having alongside perception and signification an intentional structure, which raised its status relative to the general evaluation of it in the history of philosophy,⁶ imagination is thus freed from the traditional denigration of being illusory or delusional. A further positive valuation of imagination is also made manifest in Husserl's *Ideas I*,⁷ where Husserl forcefully argues that imagination or phantasy is vital to eidetic seeing or the apprehension of essences.

Furthermore, in accordance with what I argue to be Husserl's positive valuation of phantasy, I devote a section expositing his critique of the *Bildertheorie* or the so-called "classical image-theory" espoused primarily by John Locke and David Hume. Put briefly, the *Bildertheorie* effectively argues that the "image" is immanent or intramental and is constitutive of the, say, imagined object. Thus, in the case of imagining a centaur, the *Bildertheorie* makes the error of thinking that it is the *image* of the centaur that I imagine or intend. Hence, the *Bildertheorie* is at odds with Husserl's contention that the intentional object is *transcendent* or, in other words, that the object imagined is not immanent in the intentional act. The centaur imagined is irreducible to the *image* of the centaur. Husserl maintains that there is a transcendence inherent to any intentional act such that consciousness is delivered over to what it is not, to an "other," to an object.⁸ Thus, I intend the tree that I see before me, the tree that is depicted in the picture, the tree that I am phantasying, and the tree that I signify in my utterance, and not the *percept*, the *image*, or the *sign* of a tree. Moreover, by treating imagination as an intentional modality, Husserl offers a radical re-conception of imagination

⁵ While I concentrate on Husserl's *LI*, allusions will be made to Husserl's other works, particularly *Experience and Judgment* and *Husserliana* (Hua) XXIII, i.e., Edmund Husserl, *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung*, ed. by E. Marbach (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1980; for English translation, see Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image-Consciousness, Memory*, trans. by John Brough (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).

⁶ The qualifier "almost entirely" is important in that one must consider certain exceptions, namely, Aristotle's analysis of tragedy and Kant's forging of the transcendental *Einbildungskraft* in the first of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cf. Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) and Saulius Genusas, "Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of Imagination," in *Human Studies*, 38 (2015).

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Vol. I, trans. by F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Publishers, 1983).

⁸ Cf. Dan Zahavi, *Phenomenology: The Basics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

which, I believe, fortifies what I argue to be constitutive of his *legitimation* of imagination. Husserl's radical move to treat imagination on a par with perception and signification bears out the nature of consciousness as intentional through and through, and imagination as reducing empirical exteriority.

However, as Brian Elliott informs us in *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger*,⁹ Husserl's vacillation, demonstrated in terms of his identifying, in a certain respect, imagination with perception and at others, with signification, accounts for, or at least, purports to account for, an ambiguity obfuscating Husserl's conception of phantasy. Imagination is both intuitive and inauthentic. It is intuitive because the imagined object and the image "resemble" one another, and it is inauthentic because the imagined or intended object is intuited in its absence. Being intuitive is a quality it shares with perception, while being inauthentic is a quality it shares with signification, hence, imagination shares qualities with the two. Imagination as being intuitive and inauthentic shows how the seemingly disparate modalities of perception and signification can nonetheless be brought together. This is not, as in Kant's transcendental imagination which navigates between the pure concepts of reason and sensibility, but that allow for the theoretical determination of the three intentional modalities to be enveloped under the category of objectifying intentional acts.¹⁰ The mediation that imagination assumes between perception and signification is a theoretical one because it is a mediation only insofar as it shares a quality with perception and signification. However, in contradistinction to Elliott's argument that, overall, Husserl is wont to approximate imagination closely to perception as opposed to signification, I argue that such a reading fails to sufficiently appreciate the relation between phantasy and signification that Husserl recounts in Investigation One of *LI*.

Therefore, in pulling together what I argue to be constitutive of Husserl's legitimation and delegitimation of imagination or phantasy, I seek to establish and make manifest the ambiguity in evidence in his conception or treatment of imagination. In so doing, I attempt to demonstrate how Husserl's theory of imagination is central to the formation of his theory of intentionality.

⁹ Brian Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2008). Cf. Mark P. Drost, "The Primacy of Perception in Husserl's Theory of Imagination," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 50:3 (March 1990).

¹⁰ This "theoretical determination" is evident in both *LI I* and *LI II*.

***Phantasie* as an Intentional Modality of Consciousness**

In the light of Husserl's clarion call, i.e., that of a return to experience itself as that which is amenable to consciousness and thus to phenomenological analysis, Husserl analyzes the "human lived experience" by examining what an intentional act *is* or what constitutes an intentional act. Husserl proceeds to carry out this "implied task" by categorizing and articulating the three fundamental intentional acts, namely, perception, imagination, and signification—which are intimately linked to his discussion of the intentionality of consciousness.¹¹ In other words, they constitute or characterize what it means for consciousness to be intentional in the first place. Hence, as Dan Zahavi notes in *Husserl's Phenomenology*,¹² when Husserl devotes himself in *LI* to a detailed analysis of consciousness, he does not venture to seek the empirical conditions which allow for human beings to be conscious, such as a fully developed brain. Instead, Husserl concentrates on what it really means to be conscious, that is, the constituent elements of the conscious act, the non-empirical elements that make consciousness what it is and which—crucially for phenomenology—reveal themselves to consciousness in its acts. What does Husserl's distinction between these three intentional acts consist of? A rapid sketch as regards these three objectifying intentional acts will help us here.

In perception, the intentional object (the perceived) is given in *propria persona* or in 'flesh and blood', as Husserl has it in Hua XXIII, that is, the perceived object is empirically given or available to me in *hic et nunc* or at the very moment I am intending it. Hence, perception is intuitive and authentic. In imagination, the imagined is empirically absent but is brought to presence by my imagining it, such that imagination brings something absent to presence, or as Richard Kearney puts it in *Poetics of Imagining*, the imagined is intuited in its absence. Hence, it is intuitive and *inauthentic*. In signification, the signified or the intentional object has, ostensibly, nothing to do with the sign or the vessel to which the signified is deployed, hence, the necessity for someone to learn or know the meaning of the sign. As such, signification is *inauthentic*; it could not, relative to perception, be intuitively fulfilled, i.e., it is an empty modality of intentionality. Amidst this rapid sketch, however, it is clear that in the act of perceiving, there is a specifically perceived object, in imagining, a specifically imagined object, and in signifying, a specifically signified object. Hence, I do not simply doubt, but doubt that "there will be a

¹¹ Of course, these are not the only intentional acts Husserl speaks of in *LI*. But for the purposes of the current investigation, I concentrate on these.

¹² Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

rainfall today” or, do not simply fear, but “fear that the rain will be heavy today,” do not simply judge, but “judge that my laptop is on the table,” and so on and so forth, such that my doubting, fearing, and judging, and all other intentional acts for that matter, all have a specific intentional object. In other words, consciousness does not imagine, perceive, or signify in a vacuum.

Imagination or phantasy demonstrates that the intentional object need not be restricted to the empirical object of perception, and thus that the transcendence inherent to consciousness is of a nature entirely other to the spatial and physical alterity of empirical objects. It is in this way that as Kearney informs us: “phenomenology rescues imagination from its ‘naturalistic’ confusion with perception and restores it to its essential role as a power capable of intending the unreal *as if* it were real, the absent *as if* it were present, the possible *as if* it were actual.”¹³ As articulated above, imagination provides a form of theoretical mediation between perception and signification because it demonstrates that the intentional object neither is, nor need be reducible to the empirical existing object of perception. The intentional object in the form of an imagined object reveals the minimal intentional structure—an act-object correlation—that inheres across all objectifying intentional modalities and need not contain an empirically existing object as it happens to do in perception and may do in signitive acts (in judgments of perception). Hence, the role of theoretical mediation that imagination plays between perception and signification brings out a point on which it shares in at least in one respect with what seems radically different acts, i.e., perception as intuitive and authentic, signification as non-intuitive and inauthentic. In this structure, perception and signification appear to be very detached from one another even when their links with imagination in one respect allow them to be both included under a broad array of intentional acts.

As imagination shares a common ground with perception and signification, it assumes the status of a *sui generis* intentional modality that is understood within an act-object correlation or, as Husserl later phrased it in *Ideas I*, a noetic-noematic correlation. This places imagination on an equal footing with perception and signification. And this amounts to a legitimation of imagination as it defies the traditional conceptions of imagination briefly adumbrated in the introductory section of this project. For by treating imagination as such, that is, as a non-positing act with its own type of intentional object, Husserl legitimizes and salvages imagination from the

¹³ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 17. In Hua XXIII, Husserl speaks of the object of phantasy or its peculiar character in three different ways: (i) as the *as if*, the *as it were*, and the *quasi*. Owing to the scope of this current paper, I will not touch upon this other voluminous text of Husserl.

accusations or denigration of it being illusory or delusional. Phantasy's *non-positing act-quality* accounts for how phantasying or imagining consciousness does not construe the intentional object to be empirically existing. By elevating imagination to the level of an intentional act on par with perception and signification, Husserl recognizes the fundamental role imagination assumes in demonstrating the nature of intentionality as *object-directed*. The same elevation of imagination relative to its conventional status emphasizes that since consciousness by nature is intentional through and through, then it relates to its object in various objectifying intentional acts under a single modality of intentionality, of consciousness being "object-directed."

The recognition of the object-directedness of consciousness, as we shall see in the following section, fundamentally contributes to Husserl's analysis and critique of the *Bildertheorie*. His insistence that the intentional object as in the case of imagining, is *transcendent*, that is, that consciousness entails a movement of self-transcendence, intending what is irreducible to itself, and thus is not intramental, contradicts the classical conception of the image which the *Bildertheorie* had espoused.¹⁴ The same assertion further cements what I argue to be his positive valuation of phantasy. But it still leaves unclear the status of the image in Husserl. In arguing that the intentional object is not intramental, Husserl claims that the intentional object is not the image, and—for that very reason—says little about it other than that it is operative in an intentional movement.

The Phantasied Centaur Is Not Inside My Mind, or Is It?

The *Bildertheorie* construes the imagined object as an "immanent" or mental object, that is, as Husserl recounts, it claims that "outside the thing itself, is there (or is at times there); in consciousness there is an image which does duty for it."¹⁵ In other words, the *Bildertheorie* sees the *image as standing in for it* and effectively becoming the intended object.¹⁶ In contradistinction to this thesis, Husserl emphasizes that it is different for me to imagine an image

¹⁴ *Phantasie* is neither delusional nor illusory in that it is a *non-positional consciousness*, that is, it does not construe its object to be empirically existing (although the intentional object may indeed exist somewhere else, as can the case when I imagine something *absent* at the moment, as in Sartre's example of imagining his friend Peter who happens to be in Berlin. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of Imagination*, trans. by J. Webber (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). S. Geniusas also offers an insightful reading of Husserl's distinction between *Phantasie*, illusion, and other (intentional) acts (see Saulius Geniusas, "Modes of Self-Awareness: Perception, Dreams, Memory," in *Husserl Studies*, 38:2, (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-022-09301-9>>).

¹⁵ Husserl, *LI II*, 125.

¹⁶ Ricoeur also speaks about this problematic of imagination in *From Text to Action*, particularly in the Chapter "Imagination in Discourse and in Action."

of something, like a picture within a picture, compared to imagining the thing within the image itself, where its content determines what is imagined. The *image as image* is not what consciousness is directing itself towards or what it “has in mind” but merely that through which it imagines *what* it imagines.

In §11 of *LI*’s Investigation Five, Husserl categorically asserts the “non-intramental” nature of the intentional object.¹⁷ In imagining a Pegasus or some other fictional character, a noetic–noematic correlation is established notwithstanding it being a *fictional* character. I may then subject my experience of imagining of Pegasus to a thorough “descriptive analysis.” I may, as Husserl puts it, “dismember” the intentional experience and painstakingly investigate it, examine it carefully, but the fictional intentional object, i.e., the Pegasus, will be sought in vain. As Husserl asserts: “[T]he ‘immanent’, ‘mental object’ is not therefore part of the descriptive or real make-up (*deskriptiven reellen Bestand*) of the experience, it is in truth not really immanent or mental.”¹⁸ Such a fact goes to show further that the intended object which is in this case, the *imagined*, does not “inhabit” my mind or consciousness as if it were something that, as Brough puts it in terms of a picture, is “tacked to the wall of the mind.”¹⁹ Certainly, I am conscious of the Pegasus but not of the image which I merely experience or which I undergo the moment I intend it, but this does not imply that the Pegasus or the “centaur,” to use Husserl’s example, is inside my mind or consciousness. As such, Husserl maintains that irrespective of whether the intended object exists or not, whether it is imagined or not, whether it is fictional, hallucinatory, or not, the intentional act remains nonetheless intentional, insofar as my imagining (as well as perceiving and signifying) is directed towards an object. As Husserl writes: “it makes no difference what sort of being we give our object, or with what sense or justification we do so, whether this being is real (real) or ideal, genuine, possible or impossible, the act remains ‘directed upon’ its object.”²⁰ Husserl makes a parallel point to the preceding in the vital Appendix to §§11–20. He writes: “if I represent God to myself, or an angel, or an intelligible thing-in-itself [...] I mean the transcendent object named in each case, in other words my intentional object: it makes no difference whether this object exists or is imaginary or absurd.”²¹ As such, the

¹⁷ What do we mean by “intentional object” in this context? Husserl is clear on this point. For him, when one intends a cup, it is the cup one intends (or perceives) —the cup is the object of one’s perception.

¹⁸ Husserl, *LI II*, 99.

¹⁹ John Brough, “Something That Is Nothing but Can Be Anything: The Image and Our Consciousness of It,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. by Dan Zahavi (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 2012), 546.

²⁰ Husserl, *LI II*, 120.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 127. Cf. §11 of Investigation Five in *LI*.

intentional object—whatever it might be—in no way invalidates the intentional act as intentional, i.e., as always object-directed. Hence, imagination allows one to see that intentionality can be operative whether the object is given in *propria persona* or intended only “as-if” (*als ob*).

Furthermore, Husserl, by carefully drawing the distinction between the matter and the intentional object, argues that while it is the *matter* that directs the consciousness towards the object; it is precisely the *object* that consciousness intends.²² The matter or the sensory presentation (i.e., percept, image, sign) determines that it is *this* rather than *that* that shapes the content of the intentional object.²³ It is in this way that my *imagining* (and thus in equivalent fashion, my *perceiving* and *signifying*) is directed towards the imagined or the intended object. And as such, the “image” (the matter) simply facilitates or directs my consciousness towards the intentional object just as the “percept” does in my perceiving of the “tree” and the “sign” does in my signifying. Hence, as Julia Jansen writes, for Husserl, “in all cases, consciousness of an object amounts to a relation to an object, and not to a mental representation.”²⁴ The *Bildertheorie* fails to recognize this distinction and claims instead that the imagined object is “in the mind” or “intramental.” The “matter” may be combined with various act-qualities. Thus, I can imagine or perceive that “the pail is full of water.” Conversely, act-quality may likewise be paired with various matters. Thus, I can *imagine* that the iron is hot, imagine that the iron is on the table, imagine that the coffee is hot, imagine that the portable speaker is on the table, imagine that my laptop is running out of battery, and so on. As such, as part of the intentional act, the matter is together with the act, determinative of the object intended, insofar as it is *intended*.

Hence, the *Bildertheorie* overlooks the fundamental distinction between act and object, a distinction which, as Zahavi remarks, can be further demonstrated on two counts. First, I can intend or imagine one and the same object in various ways such that the “identity of the object cannot depend on

²² Otherwise put, the matter determines the content of the intentional (intended) object. Consciousness as intentional implies that intentional (conscious) acts are directed towards the object which is always transcendent.

²³ The *percept* points to the fact that I am perceiving something, and therefore, the object, say a cup of coffee on the table, is given to me in *propria persona*. In like manner, the *image* (in *Phantasie*) and the *sign* (in signification) respectively imply that I phantasy a cup—I see it *as-if* it is given to me in *hic et nunc*—or signify it, i.e., treat it as sign which points towards the signified. This implies that the intentional object appears in a certain mode of givenness, i.e., as perceived, phantasied, signified, among others. There should be no conflating between these modes of givenness, although it is possible for the same object to be given in perception, phantasy, and signification.

²⁴ Julia Jansen, “Husserl,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, ed. by Amy Kind (New York: Routledge, 2016), 75.

the identity of the act,"²⁵ i.e., I can perceive the same cup of coffee on the table while seeing it, for instance, at a different angle. In such a case, it is the same object I (visually) perceive in these different acts of perception. Second, for Husserl, objects appear perspectively, that is, objects appear in a specific profile, such that an intentional act in no way captures the entirety of profiles constituting the total phenomenality or appearance of the object perceived or imagined from all sides. Furthermore, this perspectival nature of the perceived or imagined object allows for the possibility of variations in terms of the experienced contents while intending the same intentional object.

Phantasying Essences and Universals

In *Ideas I*, Husserl speaks of the role imagination or fantasy assumes in eidetic variation. More particularly, Husserl spells out the quintessential role of imagination in free variation with a view to the possibility of "eidetic seeing" (*Wesensschau*). This complex act finds its detailed articulation in another work of Husserl, titled *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*.²⁶ Early on in *Experience* (87a), Husserl articulates the necessity of free variation in view of eidetic seeing for the reason that "the universal which first comes to prominence in the empirically given must from the outset be freed from its character of contingency."²⁷ This is precisely so, because phantasy elevates the intended object to that status whereby it is no longer confined to or determined by its empirical or spatio-temporal component.

What does this eidetic seeing consist of? Jansen notes that for Husserl, eidetic seeing consists of three methodological phases. The first phase is that of "free variation." For Husserl, I must and can vary the examples in imagination, such that what is abiding in all of them becomes clear, a process similar to Hegel's conception of the associative imagination's rubbing off of the differences of the images and extracting the common among them.²⁸ Imagination is thus "free" on two important counts. First, imagination emancipates itself from the *limiting* confines of perception. This is so insofar as in the act of phantasying, the imagined object is not beholden to the limiting *spatio-temporal* and *empirical* components—that is, the *specific time* and *place* where the object is situated and intuited—of the intended or imagined

²⁵ Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*, 15.

²⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. by J.S. Churchill and K. Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

²⁸ Cf. *Encyclopaedia* 1830. I have also dealt with this issue at length in Mark Antony Jalalum, "Phantasie in language Formation?: Imagination in Hegel's Psychology," in *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, 16:1 (June 2022).

object as in the case of the perceived object in perception. In other words, as Jansen remarks, imagination or phantasy has the capacity to transgress the rules governing the perceived object such as the spatio-temporal and causal rules. As such, the imagined objects “may change color, shape, location, size, etc., in an instant and for no apparent reason.”²⁹ Furthermore, the imagined objects do not only transgress the spatio-temporal and causal rules but also “defy the laws of gravity and nature.”³⁰ Thus, to use Jansen’s example: the imagined objects are floating in the air despite their supposed heavy weight or talking despite their being “inanimate.”

Early on in *Ideas I*, Husserl claims that imagination unshackles things from the manacles or confines of the status of being empirical facts, such that things receive, as Kearney puts it, “an ideal status as possibilities, possibilities of which each fact is but a single instance.”³¹ Here, Kearney remarks that Husserl speaks of the “grasping of essences” which is achieved through imagination and abstraction. Reverberating with Husserl’s emphasis on imagination as having a pivotal role in eidetic seeing, Jansen writes, “[imagination] is free of all commitments to actualities, exploring strictly pure possibilities.”³² Second, imagination, “produces arbitrary variations that are ultimately experienced as an infinitely open multiplicity”³³ from which the *eidos* emerges as that which is invariable amidst the variation. The second methodological phase is best articulated in §87c of *Experience* when Husserl speaks about the superimposition and/or coinciding of similar images with each other leading to the formation of universals or essences. Incidentally, this move is also manifest in Hegel’s articulation in the “Psychology”³⁴ of the associative imagination in being fundamentally responsible for the creation of universals—a similar movement, which Hegel attributes to the function or power of associative imagination. But relative to Hegel’s insistence that it is the working of imagination through association that the universal is formed, or an essence is extracted and made known, Husserl maintains that *eidetic seeing* is a specifically undertaken series of imaginative acts, undertaken as

²⁹ Jansen, “Husserl,” 71.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 21.

³² Jansen, “Husserl,” 77. Such a reading supports the view held by several Husserl scholars that Husserl’s phenomenology is by and large an “eidetic phenomenology” (phenomenology of essence/s). Jansen, in another work, goes further to suggest that *Phantasie* assumes a central role in Husserl’s phenomenological project (see Julia Jansen, “Phantasy’s Place in Husserl’s Work: On the condition of the possibility for a phenomenology of experience,” in *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers Vol. 3*, ed. by R. Bernet, D. Welton, and G. Zavata (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit 1827–28*, trans. by R. Wood (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia 1830*.

part of the phenomenological methodology. The associative operations in Hegel are much less conscious than these. Furthermore, in a slightly different key, Husserl in *Experience* speaks of the overlapping of similar images which leads to the formation and apprehension of the universal. In the overlapping of different images, their specificities or specific determinations enter, writes Husserl, “in a purely passive way, into a synthetic unity in which they all appear as modifications of one another and then as arbitrary sequences of particulars in which the same universal is isolated as an *eidos*.”³⁵ Commenting on the ideality of meaning in Husserl, Ricoeur writes: “[i]t is always through an exercise of imagination that I grasp the ideality of meaning.”³⁶

Furthermore, Jansen notes that this second methodological phase paves the way for the third, such that this “overlapping coincidence” as Husserl calls it, allows for the possibility of identifying the universal which is also in itself the *eidos*. This *eidos* which transcends particularities and specificities, is, as Husserl describes in §87a, “that without which an object of a particular kind cannot be thought, i.e., without which the object cannot be intuitively imagined as such.”³⁷ Moreover, albeit by way of articulating the basic problem confronting Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger, that is, the relation between the empirically real and the transcendently ideal, Elliott, articulates how for Husserl phantasy is vital to phenomenological analysis. In an attempt to offer a Husserlian answer to the same problem, Elliott provides a detailed account of Husserl’s intention–fulfilment dynamic. Intuition or any act of intuition, as Elliott puts it, *fulfils* the intention. As such, it appears that Husserl, without resorting to a kind of third term between reason and sensibility as Kant had done with the transcendental *Einbildungskraft*, manages to establish the relation between the transcendently ideal and the empirically real. However, that Husserl has not resorted to a third term, Elliott argues, is not definitely the case, since Husserl in his *early writings* prior to his *LI* articulates two ways by which he may have resorted to a third term in an attempt to provide a clear account of the unity between the transcendently ideal and the empirically real. For one, Husserl recognizes the fundamental role that imagination or “free fantasy” assumes in the phenomenological analysis, so much so that he maintains though not without controversy, that ““feigning” [“Fiktion”] makes the vital

³⁵ Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 343.

³⁶ The quoted passage is from Paul Ricoeur’s yet unpublished *Lectures on Imagination* (1975) he delivered at the University of Chicago. George H. Taylor is currently editing the same lectures and is expected to come out in print in early months of 2024. I express my sincerest gratitude to Prof. Taylor for allowing me to access Ricoeur’s unpublished lectures.

³⁷ Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 341.

element of phenomenology as of every eidetic sciences, that feigning is the source from which the cognition of “eternal truths” is fed.”³⁸

What the preceding articulation amounts to, therefore, is that Husserl speaks about it being better to use cases of acts that are imagined—a perceptual act as one imagines oneself performing it—for phenomenological purposes. So, it is better for me, when investigating the essence of perception, not to take an actual perceptual act as my object of analysis, but to imagine myself perceiving an object. In this way, I take advantage of imagination’s *reduction of everything empirical* with the inclusion in normal acts for perception of a present, empirical object. The real intentional object of perception is thus contained within the phantasied act of perceiving, though without its actual empirical presence. Elliott notes that Husserl’s “preference for imaginary presentation in phenomenological description”³⁹ demonstrates that the meaningfulness of mental acts is fundamentally independent of the actual or empirical existence of an intentional object. Otherwise put, imagination performs a sort of phenomenological reduction that makes possible the appearance of the transcendental.⁴⁰

Hence, from what I have demonstrated thus far, it becomes apparent that Husserl provides a positive account or evaluation of imagination evinced in his treatment of imagination as an intentional modality and as a potent argument against the claims of the *Bildertheorie*, and as vital to *eidetic seeing*. Having articulated such, in what way then does Husserl treat imagination in a negative fashion? What does his delegitimation of imagination consist of?

***Phantasie*: Close to Perception or Signification?**

In this section, I examine how for Husserl the proximity of phantasy to signification is undermined in the name of maintaining it as an offshoot of perception. Husserl’s elevation of imagination to an intentional act on an equal footing with perception and signification, I maintain, provides a fertile ground for phantasy to be recognized as being fundamentally engaged with, or even in, signification. Husserl does not develop this rapport as thoroughly as he might have done. The structure of the act–object correlation enveloping perception, imagination, and signification, I argue, contributes to Husserl’s

³⁸ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 160. This point is also of immense importance in Husserl’s distinction between “fact” and “truth” in the early parts of *Ideas I*. Put briefly, whereas facts are contingent, that is to say, they can be otherwise, truth is unchanging.

³⁹ Elliott, *Phenomenology and Imagination*, 6.

⁴⁰ But one might ask: what particular form of phantasy is actually employed in eidetic seeing? One may employ, I argue, as many forms of phantasy possible. There are good reasons to suppose that such is Husserl’s suggestion not only in *Ideas* but also in other manuscripts, particularly in Hua XXIII, where he devotes himself to a detailed analysis of *Phantasie*.

identifying imagination in certain respects with perception, and at times, with signification. This *identification* goes back to the fact that insofar as imagination is intuitive, it approximates closely to perception, while it being inauthentic draws Husserl to identify imagination with acts of signification. Hence, this identification and Husserl's failure to fortify or develop further the rapport between imagination and signification, I maintain, constitutes his delegitimation of imagination.⁴¹

It must be noted that the ambiguity I am alleging is neither articulated in full in Investigation One nor in Investigations Five and Six of *LI*. But Husserl touches upon this ambiguity in a scattered manner in various sections of Investigation Six, where he shifts his inquiry from discussing the matters of consciousness and meaning (Investigation Five) to that of epistemological questioning (Investigation Six). In Investigation One, however, Husserl articulates the possibility for phantasy to be involved in signification or particularly in silent monologue, hence, imagination's proximity to signification. As such, attempts to demonstrate the same ambiguity confront the challenge of piecing together Husserl's various articulations regarding imagination as now allied with perception, now with signification.

We may point to two reasons which I think are constitutive of the argued ambiguity, namely, the object-directedness of consciousness and the relation between meaning-intention and fulfilment. The object-directedness of consciousness is vital here because the pointing away of the word-sound closely resembles or is very much like what a sign is or does. As such, it appears that signification assumes that moment not only in imagination but in all intentional acts insofar as the sensory presentation (i.e., percept, image, sign) points away from itself to the object. Otherwise put, the idea of intentionality, of act-matter, appears to presuppose a certain sign movement, a pointing away from sensory content to an object. The image as sensory presentation directs or points the consciousness towards the imagined object. And such a point evinces the possibility for a rapport between imagination and signification.⁴² Imagination, therefore, will have been vital to thought and

⁴¹ A further point, I think, which has contributed to this ambiguous status of phantasy in Husserl's *LI* consists in the fact that Husserl has not yet spelled out—relative to what one finds in Hua XXIII—in greater detail the distinction between perception, phantasy, signification, among others. In Hua XXIII, he clarifies that, whereas perception, memory, and anticipation are positional consciousness, that is, they posit their objects to be existing, phantasy is non-positional consciousness, i.e., it does not construe its object to be empirically existing—there is no doxastic belief as regards the existence of the phantasied object (Cf. 1904–05 Lectures, Hua XXIII).

⁴² In "Text Nr. XIV," Hua XXIII, Husserl has insightfully dealt with this point at length. He maintained that in cases where—as can the case with picture consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*)—the image object does not faithfully resemble, depict, or represent the image subject, what one has is an image object which *symbolically* represents the image subject, i.e., the

logos had it been aligned with signification, with signs as they are deployed in the to-and-fro of communicative discourse. *LI I*, despite its promising account of phantasy functioning in inner monologue, does not seem to say that much.⁴³

In Investigations Five and Six, Husserl speaks of the relation between “meaning-intention” and “fulfilment,” a relation which implicates imagination as an offshoot of perception or approximates imagination closely to perception at the expense of the possibility of it being vitally involved in the activity of signification. Early on in Investigation Six (particularly in §11) Husserl talks about the relation between the concept or thought and the corresponding intuition. Husserl writes in §13: “[a]ll intentions have corresponding possibilities of fulfillment (or opposed frustration): these themselves are peculiar transitional experiences, characterizable as acts, which permit each other to ‘reach its goal’ in an act specially correlated with it.”⁴⁴ Jansen affirms the same point, thus: “Husserl points out that the most important feature imagining shares with perceiving is that both constitute an *immediate* intuitive awareness of objects. Neither of them, according to Husserl, involves awareness of representations or ideas (from which an object may at best be inferred).”⁴⁵

Husserl maintains that when the intention “matches” with the intuition or when the intuition coincides with the intention, the intention is

phantasied object in picture consciousness. This insight is important in that the symbolical representation of the image subject, as opposed to a “thoroughgoing resemblance” which points *inward*, points outward. For this reason, an image object which depicts an image subject symbolically exhibits the same dynamic one finds in signification, or the sign –signified link—of the sign *pointing away from itself* towards the signified. For relevant analysis of this point as it figures in *LI*, see Chapters IV and VII of Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. by L. Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011).

⁴³ I concur with some Husserl scholars such as Bernet and Byrne arguing that one has to wait for a much later texts for Husserl’s detailed treatment of signs (Cf. Hua XX-1, i.e., Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Ergänzungsband. Erster Teil. Entwürfe zur Umarbeitung der VI. Untersuchung und zur Vorrede für die Neuauflage der Logischen Untersuchungen*, ed. by U. Melle (Den Haag: Kluwer Publishers, 2002); Hua XX-2, i.e., Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Ergänzungsband Zweiter Teil. Texte für die Neufassung der VI. Untersuchung. Zur Phänomenologie des Ausdrucks und der Erkenntnis*, ed. by U. Melle (Den Haag: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002). By “not saying that much” above, I mean Husserl has not further develop the rapport between phantasy and signification. Indeed, Husserl provides an extensive analysis of signs in “Essential Distinctions.” But his analysis, perhaps owing to the fact that it was not in any way concerned with establishing the connection between phantasy and signification, fails to articulate the role of phantasy in language in further. Derrida’s critique of Husserl in this regard consists in this: that signs function as reproducible ideality, thereby implicating phantasy as a reproductive agency (Cf. Chapter IV, *Voice and Phenomena*).

⁴⁴ Husserl, *LI II*, 216.

⁴⁵ Jansen, “Husserl,” 73.

fulfilled; if not, the intention is frustrated. In other words, intuition either fulfils or frustrates the intention, such that the intention–intuition relation is synthesized either by way of *identification* or *distinction*; and these syntheses are in themselves objectifying acts. The latter forms of synthesis owe a brief articulation. To use Husserl’s own example, when I intend that “A is green” and the intuition shows that “A is green” then the intention is fulfilled, and thus, there is an *identification*, that is, the intention “A is green” is identified as such in intuition. Hence, there is no conflict between the intention and intuition, but a fulfilment. However, if I intend “A is green” but the intuition turns out to be that “A is red”, then the intention is frustrated. But the same “experience of conflict puts things into relation and unity,” as Husserl puts it, insofar as “A is green” is distinguished from “A is red,” and thus, are distinguished from each other.⁴⁶ The former synthesis, i.e., the synthesis of fulfilment is a kind of synthesis which Husserl calls “identifications binding self-manifestations of an object to self-manifestations of the same object.”⁴⁷

Husserl will later on maintain in *Experience* that the hidden profiles of the intentional object are *emptily co-intended*,⁴⁸ that is, they, together with what is seen — as can the case with visual perception — are *intended*; otherwise, it would not make any sense to say, ‘I am perceiving a cup (of coffee) on top a table’. One might maintain that the link between perception and phantasy may be established here, i.e., that imagination can supply the *anticipated* profiles of the intentional object, and thus, Husserl will have appeared to be implicating phantasy in some acts of perception. Otherwise put, in the case of perceiving something, whereby owing to the object’s nature as appearing perspectively, other profiles are not perceived in the single intentional act, imagination will have assumed a role in supplying the object’s other profiles which are not outrightly perceived. For instance, in perceiving a laptop, I do

⁴⁶ Cf. *LI II*, Investigation Six, particularly §§ 10, 11, and 13.

⁴⁷ Husserl, *LI II*, 221.

⁴⁸ I must note in passing, however, that some scholars working on Husserl — Prof. Maxime Doyon, for instance — would refer to this point not as *empty co-intention* but *anticipation*, that is, the hidden profiles are not emptily co-intended but *anticipated*. Doyon proposed this view in his keynote lecture delivered at the “2023 Copenhagen Summer School in Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind,” at the University of Copenhagen, DK (the conference I participated in, which took place from 14–19 August 2023, was organized by Prof. Dan Zahavi in coordination with the Ph.D. School and the Centre for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen). Such a reading is far from being immune to objections. For one, one can argue — and this thesis is not without textual basis — that as regards the other profiles of the intentional object, they are indeed given as part of the horizon of perceptual experience; and anticipation is apt for a kind of “not-yet” which is proper to a certain future. In other words, anticipation is linked to “futurity.” On “anticipation” and “futurity,” see Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, trans. by A.J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001); Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time 1893–1917*, trans. by J.B. Brough (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991).

not immediately perceive all the other parts constituting it such as its intricate internal connections, and whatnot, but I can — although, I do not *ordinarily* do so — anticipate and *imagine* or *know* through an interpretative *Auffassung* that the laptop has all those parts without necessarily breaking or dissecting the laptop into parts or pieces.⁴⁹ This supposed power of imagination, working in conjunction with anticipation and interpretative *Auffassung* suggests that imagination plays a certain role in all intuitive acts. One intends not just the profile of an object, but the object imagined or conceived as many-sided. This point finds its categorical pronouncement in Husserl's remark on the perspectival nature of the object. Writes he: "all perceiving and imagining, is, on our view, a web of partial intentions, fused together in the unity of a single total intention."⁵⁰ At the outset, it is indeed tempting to espouse the view the phantasy supplies the hidden profiles of what is perceived. But while *LI* appears to be open to such kind reading, Hua XXIII makes clear that the "fields of regard" proper to perception and phantasy could not overlap, let alone intermingle. Their respective "fields of regard" are different things. As Husserl puts it, "inspected more closely, precisely *corresponding fields of touch cannot be filled out simultaneously as fields of sensation and as phantasy fields: this can only happen in conscious succession, just as in the case of the field of vision.*"⁵¹ An exception — if it is all justified to call it an exception — in terms of the possibility for perception and phantasy to 'come together' is *Bildbewusstsein* (image consciousness), since in it, an empirical content, an image-object is needed to re-present an image-subject. But in *Bildbewusstsein*, imagination makes no such act of supplying any hidden profiles, rather, it takes on an altogether different function, namely, re-presenting an image-subject through an image object, as would be the case in portraits (and whatnot).

Husserl details further the structure arguably shared by perception and imagination. The imagined object, just like the perceived, which is intended in various instances remains one and the same object in each imagining occasion. As Husserl puts it: "corresponding to the synthesis of manifold of perceptions, where the same object always presents *itself*, we have the parallel synthesis of a manifold of imaginations, in which the same object appears *in a likeness.*"⁵² Thus, imagination's intuitive quality approximates closely to perception. Elliott maintains the same point in a chapter devoted to articulating Husserl's intentionality of consciousness.

⁴⁹ For a more recent treatment of Husserl's concept of interpretative *Auffassung*, see Ka-yu Hui, "The Hyle of Imagination and Reproductive Consciousness: Husserl's Phenomenology of Phantasy Reconsidered," in *Husserl Studies*, 38:3 (2022).

⁵⁰ Husserl, *LI II*, 211.

⁵¹ Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory 1898–1925*, trans. by John Brough (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 181. Italics added.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 222.

Elliott argues that Husserl approximates imagination closely to perception and distances the former from signification insofar as the sign and signified have nothing to do with each other.

However, although Husserl, as Elliott further notes, is drawn, on the one hand, to approximating imagination closely to perception insofar as it is intuitive, to some extent, on the other hand, he construes imagination to be approximately close to signification insofar as it is inauthentic. Overall, however, Elliott argues that Husserl appears to closely align imagination to perception relative to signification insofar as there is a kind of *inner connection* between act and object which is common to perception and imagination. This inner connection is not shared by the sign–signified relation. Hence, the interpretation that imagination is an offshoot of perception. As such, as Mark Raftery-Skehan argues⁵³ Husserl emphasizes the proximity between perception and imagination, and thus overlooks the rapport he has begun to show between imagination and signification, of an interpretative *Auffassung* being involved in each. This is indicative of his attempt “to safeguard the autonomy of conceptual thought and expression.”⁵⁴ Here, it must be noted further that Husserl begins to conform to the general trend in the classical tradition of keeping apart imagination and signification. Such is a conformity which downplays or undermines the fertile possibility for there being a rapport between imagination and signification as evinced by the fact that there is a determination and an *Auffassung* of the sensory presentation in both, as Husserl himself demonstrates. Interestingly, Kearney emphasizes this failure of Husserl to recognize the proximity between imagination and signification. Kearney argues that imagination and signification “are not two opposed modes of intentionality but are inextricably related through their common belonging to language.”⁵⁵

Raftery-Skehan argues that the sign–signified relation is not simply non-intuitive insofar as one needs the sign that is intuitive in its determinate

⁵³ Mark Raftery-Skehan, “An Imagination Reductive or Reproductive of the Sign? The Possibility of Signification in Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen* and Derrida’s *La voix et le phénomène*” (Unpublished manuscript, May 2019). Suffice it to say here that insofar as my concentration in this section is directed towards articulating the ambiguity clouding Husserl’s treatment of imagination, I do away with taking on-board and in detailed fashion the difference between Husserl and Derrida’s treatment of signification. Raftery-Skehan has dealt with the same distinction extensively. I thank Prof. Raftery-Skehan for allowing me to access this early version of his article on the Husserl–Derrida debate on imagination and signification. See also Michele Averchi, “Husserl on Communication and Knowledge Sharing in *Logical Investigations* and a 1931 Manuscript,” in *Husserl Studies*, 34:3 (October 2018).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵ Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, 145. Here, Kearney seems to echo Paul Ricoeur’s contention that fiction is language-based (Cf. Paul Ricoeur, “The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality,” in *Man and World*, 12:2 (June 1979).

intuitability for signification to function. This intuitive content is not simply arbitrary, that is, it is conventionally determined in a language, and one cannot simply change or replace that intuitive content for another willy-nilly. It has a certain necessity for the community of speakers of that language. It involves an operation of *Auffassung*, just as does imagination, which, requires an operation of *Auffassung* interpretatively determining the sensory presentation or the physical image.⁵⁶ Hence, imagination and signification have more in common than might first appear, as when the distinction between arbitrariness and resemblance is that used to grasp them. Husserl shows this, but his text gives the impression, as Elliott comments or interprets, that the intuitive modalities, i.e., perception and imagination, must be rigorously segregated from the supposedly “empty” modality of signification.

In §25 of *LI II*, Husserl recognizes the fact that the signified could not simply just “hang in the air,” hence it has to “cling on” (*als Anhang*) to an “intuitable sign,” or as Husserl puts it, “we always find it clinging to an intuitive basis.”⁵⁷ Thus, the intrinsic material of the sign furnishes an “intuitive support (*Anhalt*)” to the signified without necessarily providing an intuitive fulfilment to signification. In other words, consciousness utilizes the sign at the service of the signified (meaning) by making it the carrier of meaning such that the sign is at the disposal of the signified. Thus, signification requires further supplementary acts for its intention to be intuitively fulfilled, which basically amounts to knowing. What allows therefore for or what determines the sign to be a sign carrying a particular meaning (signified) in a particular signitive act? The entry point to answering the preceding question can be found in Husserl’s articulation of the act-character, apperception, or apprehension (*Auffassung*). Signitive *Auffassung* determines or allows for my utterance of a word-sound to mean beyond its mere intuitive-content. Hence, the necessity of *Auffassung* in the sign being not only merely intuitable but also intelligible as having an intuitive content that determines the signified, albeit in a different manner than the way in which the image determines the imagined.

Interestingly, as Raftery-Skehan notes, Husserl’s articulation of the moment of *Auffassung* in both imagination and signification assumes a role in dealing with resemblance consequently leading to the necessity of

⁵⁶ Husserl maintains that it is the act-character and the mode of *Auffassung* or the apprehension of the presentation that causes the image to be taken as representational in character. Hence, the portrait of Frederick the Great or of Johannes Sebastian Bach or of Pope Paul VI becomes a portrait by virtue of it being interpreted as such, that is, as a portrait of such and such. The same is also made manifest in signification, but such a possibility has been overlooked and underdeveloped at least insofar as Husserl’s account in *LI* is concerned.

⁵⁷ Husserl, *LI II*, 241.

postulating a signitive reproductive imagination.⁵⁸ As such, resemblance allows us to identify two occasions of a sign as being the same sign, hence, on the one hand, the resemblance between sensory presentation and intentional object in imagination, and on the other hand, the “ideal” resemblance between occasions of the sensory presentation central to the possibility of the sign’s identity.⁵⁹ The imagination operative in imagination, that is, in seeing the resemblance between the image and the imagined is operative in signification, but this time in reproducing resembling occasions of signs, that is, as *Auffassung*, as interpreted as all amounting to one and the same sign (or “word”).⁶⁰

While Husserl assigns to imagination a role in producing the intuitive content of the sign in silent monologue in *LI*’s Investigation One, and thus demonstrates that imagination identifies itself with signification in soliloquizing thought, this role that imagination assumes, however, is far more complex. Imagination does not just produce a sensible content for the word or sign and thus is never simply an intuitable content but in itself, a sensible ideality. Taking his cue from Derrida’s assertion in *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology* regarding reproductive imagination’s role in reproducing signs, Raftery-Skehan maintains that in Husserl there is a role for *Phantasie* in reproducing the sign and the signified.⁶¹ Hence, the thesis that imagination is little more than an offshoot of perception is simplistic indeed. As such, Husserl’s treatment of imagination is not without the same ambiguity as the accounts

⁵⁸ Raftery-Skehan, “Imagination Reductive or Reproductive,” 9.

⁵⁹ Cf. Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon*, Chapters III and IV. The sign is an originally ideal reproducibility for Derrida, something also to be found in Husserl. See also Sections V and VI of Jacques Derrida *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. by J.P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) and “Form and Meaning” in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁶⁰ It must be noted, however, that resemblance between, say, two (copies of the same) books will have to be rigorously distinguished from the apparent similarity discernible in the functioning of signs—of signs being reproduced in the to-and-fro of communicative discourse. There is a certain “ideality” operative in signs, enabling signs to be “identically” across various instantiations or instances of being utilised. It is within this context that reproductive phantasy will have been summoned (Cf. Chapter IV of Derrida’s *Voice and Phenomenon*).

⁶¹ In *Voice and Phenomenon*, Derrida critiques Husserl’s description of soliloquizing thought on the ground that (as Derrida maintains) Husserl attributes the ideality of signs solely to inner-monologue and not to the other communicative modalities. But such a critique, as Rudolf Bernet argues in “Husserl’s Theory of Signs Revisited,” fails to consider the significant modifications Husserl has done to his theory of signs which one could find, for instance, in the manuscripts from 1913 and 1914 (Hua XX-1 and XX-2, respectively). However, Derrida, in a sense, could not be wholly faulted for having, to a huge degree, confined his critique of Husserl’s theory of signs to the first of *LI*. One reason being, that for the Derrida of the *Voice and Phenomenon*, Hua XX-1 and XX-2 have not yet been made available; it is extremely likely that he knew nothing of, let alone examine these texts.

of imagination articulated in the classical tradition. Interestingly, this ambiguous role of imagination in Husserl is fundamentally a role of it as theoretical mediation between perception and signification. As an intentional modality theoretically mediating between perception and signification, imagination is elevated to the status of being an intentional act on a par with perception and signification, and thus is freed from the traditional denigration of it as being illusory or delusional. However, as a theoretical mediation between perception and signification, imagination has been delegitimized by neglecting its potentially vital role in signification in favor of treating it as an offshoot of perception.⁶²

A brief articulation regarding Husserl and Derrida's articulation of the sign in *Voice and Phenomenon* suffices here. In §8 (Investigation One) of *LI*, Husserl speaks of the sign in inner monologue. For Husserl, in silent thought, the sign, which is either expressive or indicative, assumes the role of an expression in the course of consciousness's act of meaning. Thus, signification starts in that very act of meaning-intention, such that the sign's meaning, for the Husserl of the *LI*, springs from the meaning-intention itself. As such, Husserl maintains that silent monologue allows for the possibility of pure expression insofar as the signs here availed of by consciousness are representations of signs or imagined (*vorgestellt*) signs and not materially existing signs. This cements Husserl's claim that silent conscious thought—and of course, by extension, signs in all signifying modalities—transcends the empirical conditions or reality of language.⁶³ This is so because the signs availed of in silent monologue are free from circulating in communication, dislocated from the meaning-intention that for Husserl in Investigation One, posits as being the essence of a meaningful expression. It is consciousness imbuing the sounds with meaning that makes them meaningful, rather than language as a system other to each consciousness that Husserl privileges.⁶⁴ For Derrida, on the other hand, signification starts by the very fact that there

⁶² Again, as per the immediately preceding footnote, this holds true only to *LI*.

⁶³ Cf. §9, "Essential Distinctions," *LI I*.

⁶⁴ As I have adumbrated above, Husserl recognises the signs' being ideally reproducible in a number of later manuscripts, in Hua XX-1 and Hua XX-2, among others. Recent works on Husserl's theory of signification are as follows: Thomas Byrne, "The Evolution of Husserl's Semiotics: The *Logical Investigations* and its Revisions (1901-1914)," in *Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique*, 14:5 (2018), <<https://popups.uliege.be/1783-2041/>>; Thomas Byrne, "Surrogates and Empty Intentions: Husserl's "On the Logic of Signs" as the Blueprint for his First Logical Investigations," in *Husserl Studies*, 33:3 (2017), <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10743-017-9210-7>>; Thomas Byrne, "Husserl's Early Semiotics and Number Signs: *Philosophy of Arithmetic* Through the Lens of "On the Logic of Signs (Semiotic)," in *The Journal of British Society for Phenomenology*, 48:4 (2017), <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2017.1299941>>.

is already a system of instituted signs which are already meaningful.⁶⁵ Here, it must be pointed out that for Derrida, the sign is a *reproducible ideality*. In other words, for a sign to count as sign, then it must be “iterable” on other occasions independent of its actual iteration.

Furthermore, “for the sign to be a sign, it must be irreducible to this or that particular appearance. The word transcends the particularity of each instantiation, yet its every instantiation presupposes this transcendent ideality.”⁶⁶ However, the *indicative* nature of the sign for Husserl is a reduction of the original meaning-intention performed by consciousness to a kind of materiality, which gets lost in the vicissitudes of the day-to-day discourse. In other words, for Husserl, the indicative sign is a derivative mode of sign’s functioning. However, irrespective of their differing views regarding imagination’s role in signification, Husserl and Derrida recognize the vital involvement of imagination in that act of “de-materialization,” that is, in the act “of extricating the sign from a merely phenomenal, intuitable essence,”⁶⁷ a kind of an *idealizing operation*. Hence, insofar as imagination or phantasy assumes a role in making the sign “ideal,” by which it is no longer reducible to its merely intuitable content or its empirical existence and counts *as such and such* a determinate linguistic sign conforming to the ideal conditions of the possibility of signification or language, there will be a vital role for phantasy in signification in Husserl. This does not mean that phantasy conditions meaning; instead, *Phantasie*, within the context of silent thought, secures the meaning from it being dislocated from the original punctual meaning-intention or it being influenced by anything apart from the original meaning intention itself.⁶⁸ However, such function in no way denies the possibility for phantasy to work in language beyond the punctual act of meaning-intention.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ It would be a mistake to suppose that Derrida holds the view one must start from any actual forms of empirical language; rather, he argues that ideal conditions of possibility enable the possibility of any “actual” language.

⁶⁶ Raftery-Skehan, “Imagination Reductive or Reproductive,” 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁸ Derrida will, however, suggest that while the original reproducibility of signs, i.e., of the possibility of signs being utilised by other speakers in discourse enables signs to be operative in the first place, signs remain nonetheless open to the possibility of “distortions” and whatnot. But such a case allows not only for reproduction but also for a kind of production of (new) signs.

⁶⁹ Cf. *LI*, i.e., Husserl’s analysis of the judgement of perception and Chapter VIII of Derrida’s *Voice and Phenomenon*.

Conclusion

Having gone through the presentation or demonstration above, it is now clear that Husserl's conception of imagination or *Phantasie* is obscured indeed by an ambiguity. As I have sought to show, this ambiguity is spelled out in his act of positively valuing imagination made manifest through a number of reasons adumbrated above and delegitimizing it by failing to fortify or establish further the fertile rapport between imagination and signification he has adumbrated in *LI I*. Husserl may not have explicitly declared his hesitation to develop an imagination that assumes a vital role in signification. However, as his scattered accounts and notes in *passim* in *LI* show, he is wont to treat imagination as an offshoot of perception. But this is a more complicated point as attested to by the telling passages which he devotes himself to in *LI's* Investigation One in painstakingly articulating the role of imagination in silent thought and signification. Hence, whether intended or otherwise, Husserl's conception of imagination has been obscured by an ambiguity. In failing to recognize the significance of his own insights into the commonalities between imagination and signification, Husserl perpetuates the gestures of the philosophers suggested in the introduction in keeping apart the image from the *logos*, imagination from conceptual thought.

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Article

Marion on the Salience of the Irreducible Human and the Broadening of Reason to Phenomenological Ethical Inquiry

Ben Carlo N. Atim

Abstract: While Marion disavows talking about ethics and does not explicitly articulate or directly engage with ethical issues, I argue that his views of human reason and the irreducibility of the human person is salient to phenomenological ethical inquiry. An analysis and explication of Marion's thoughts on the human person and reason support the view that his phenomenological thoughts have ethical implications as they broaden the scope of ethical inquiry to characterize ethical life more comprehensively. Thus, his views on the irreducible human person and reason are enriching, helpful, and relevant in ethical philosophizing and practice. The first part of this paper broadly discusses the context of Marion's phenomenological project and its relation to ethics. The second part analyzes Marion's thoughts on the human person as a phenomenon of event and his attempt to broaden our understanding of human reason through fundamental phenomenological concepts like the types of phenomena, the saturated phenomenon, and his phenomenology of love or charity. The third part examines the implications of his views on a phenomenological ethical inquiry by demonstrating how they enrich our ethical or moral capacity to deal with ethical concerns, issues, and problems.

Keywords: Marion, human person, saturated phenomenon, charity

The Seeming In/Visibility of Ethical Thought in Jean-Luc Marion

Just because something is invisible to the "eye" does not mean it cannot be seen. What is invisible to the eye will be visible when one widens the horizons for something to emerge. Just like a painting that shows everything yet slowly and gradually, the same is true of human thought concealed in written text. Such is the case of Jean-Luc Marion when asking

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whether he has ethical ideas to offer us. One of the criticisms against Marion is “his lack of interest in ethics and politics,”¹ not just because it is not his primary concern, perhaps, but according to Christina Gschwandtner, “in fact, he thinks that ethics in the traditional sense is no longer possible today.”² That is why it is difficult, if not implausible, to establish a systematic and comprehensive ethical account of Marion’s thoughts. One of his commentators, Gerald McKenny, noticed that “there is an apparent evasion of the ethical in Marion’s work—evident not only in the fact that he has never written a book on ethics but more significantly in the fact that he seems determined to avoid speaking of ethics even where his inquiries seem to demand it.”³ But this does not mean that there is no way to identify an ethical aspect to Marion’s phenomenological views. For instance, Marion’s discourse on love implies a discussion on ethics. In fact, according to McKenny, Marion’s account of charity or love contains a veritable ethical resource for ethical reflection and philosophizing. He understood Marion’s phenomenological meditation on love as “a condition of the possibility of justice and that love completes justice,” which overcomes “the split between love and justice that is characteristic of much of modern ethics,” and that love conserves ethics against nihilism.⁴ McKenny asserts that this view “sets [Marion] against much of modern moral philosophy.”⁵ In other words, we may say that Marion’s phenomenological account of love serves as a locus of ethical relation as well.⁶

A similar view about the ethical aspect of Marion’s phenomenology is that of Amy Antoninka who argues that “Marion’s phenomenology can be viewed as a counter-ethics”⁷ against the prevailing brands of ethical systems like Kantian ethics. Antoninka believes that Marion’s “critique of Kantian ethics, and his critique of Levinas, suggest that he opposes modern metaphysical ethics.”⁸ It means that Marion “is not against all ethics, but against ethics that make humans into objects, obligations, universals, and

¹ Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Jean-Luc Marion,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. by Hugh LaFollette (Malden: Blackwell, 2013), 3157.

² *Ibid.*, 3155.

³ Gerald McKenny, “(Re)placing Ethics: Jean-Luc Marion and the Horizon of Modern Morality,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. by Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 340.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁶ Geoffrey Dierckxsens, “Loving Unintentionally: Charity and the Bad Conscience in the Works of Levinas and Marion,” in *Bijdragen International Journal in Philosophy and Religion*, 73:1 (2012), 5.

⁷ Amy Antoninka, “Without Measure: Marion’s Apophatic-Virtue Phenomenology of Iconic Love” (PhD Dissertation: Baylor University, USA, 2009), 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

abstractions.”⁹ She also claims that Marion’s phenomenological account of iconic love opens a possibility for developing ethics through his account of the saturated phenomenon of the icon and love which Antoninka calls an “apophatic-virtue ethic.”¹⁰ Thus, she asserts that “Marion has room for a descriptive account of ethics and that ignoring ethics undermines his overall project.”¹¹

Another important context where one can perhaps establish Marion’s view of ethics is his phenomenological analysis of phenomenality and its relation to the concrete other.¹² Cheongho Lee explains, “At the center of Marion’s ethical views, there stands the reality of the infinity of ethical relations with the other. Ethics is initiated, actualized when the other appears to us as [a] phenomenon.”¹³ What makes Marion’s account of love or charity as already implying a command or ethical responsibility, Geoffrey Dierckxsens argues, is his insistence that such an ethical relation is only possible when the other is “a particular or concrete other who surely is unique or has his or her own singular experiences; it is only in being face-to-face with a concrete unique other than the ethical injunction can be expressed,”¹⁴ which is not the case in Levinas. According to this view, Marion’s ethics assumes that a view of the concrete (human) other presupposes an ethical dimension. It only needs to be seen from the viewpoint of the (saturated) phenomenon to infer a clear view of what ethical ideas one can discern from Marion’s thoughts. Hence, it is possible to say that Marion’s phenomenological thoughts conceal some ethical insights that we can learn from. Kevin Hart, for instance, believes that Marion’s possible phenomenological ethics can be described as “a discourse on values, on how we should live,” and intimates that “there is an opportunity to debate ‘intuitionist ethics’...and Marion in France.”¹⁵ But his suggestion requires an investigation into the connection between Marion and “intuitionist ethics.” He also connects love to Marion’s response to moral problems but quickly clarifies that this does not tell the whole story of ethics. As Hart writes, “It may be ‘first ethics’ (in the sense of

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³ Lee Cheongho, “From Phenomenology to Ethics: Intentionality and the Other in Marion’s Saturated Phenomenon,” in *Journal of Ethics*, 1:116 (2017), <<http://doi.org/10.15801/je.1.116.201711.63>>, 73–74.

¹⁴ Dierckxsens, “Loving Unintentionally,” 18.

¹⁵ Kevin Hart, “How Marion Gives Himself,” in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. by Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 22.

‘first philosophy’), but it may not be a decent guide to [living] how to live concretely with other people.”¹⁶

These accounts attest that it is possible to venture into this aspect of Marion’s phenomenology. Through explicating his concepts of the human person as a phenomenon and the broadening of human reason (no longer limited to the principle of sufficient reason, but also includes insufficient reason or negative certainties), this essay hopes to show, enrich, and support the claims of those above on the potential ethical ideas embedded in Marion’s thoughts and demonstrate that such ideas provide an alternative perspective to an understanding of ethics, phenomenological in character, and its style of inquiry.

The Irreducible Human as an Evental Phenomenon and the Broadening of Human Reason

Understanding Marion’s view of the human person as an evental phenomenon and the broadening of reason requires a comprehensive discussion which unfortunately cannot be done in this paper. Instead, a general overview may help determine the essential characteristics of phenomena, as Marion understood it.

The Phenomenality of Object and Subject Phenomena

In Marion’s *Negative Certainties*, he classifies two distinct forms of phenomenality of phenomena: objective phenomenon and subjective phenomenon.¹⁷ He defines the objective phenomenon as “that which remains of the thing once it has been subjected to the requirements of certainty.”¹⁸ Marion returns to the old view of the object (*ob-jectum*) as determined or defined “within the classical scheme of adequation.”¹⁹ This means that for Marion, our understanding of an object is typically framed by something that adequately corresponds to our mental representation and is radicalized by Descartes and Kant. Such a radical act sees the object as something within the bounds of the knowable, while those “which cannot become an object”²⁰ are placed outside the knowable terrain.

What distinguishes one from the other is that the objective type is descriptive, evident, factual, and knowable. This phenomenon has four basic

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, trans. by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), §25, 156.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §25, 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §25, 159.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

features: quantifiable, foreseeable, causal, and possible. A phenomenon is quantifiable when one can fully grasp, predict and determine with certainty the totality of its characteristics “without any remainder.”²¹ For Marion, quantification indicates dimensions that have definite parameters which “determine all the characteristics of its essence (or of its ‘concept’), in principle without any remainder; as a result, it can be predicted, since its totality consists only in the sum of its parts and its characteristic quantifications.”²² The second feature is foreseeability. Since it is quantifiable, one foresees or determines its ends. By “the permanence of its characteristics,”²³ it is easy to foresee what it will become. The third feature is causality. For Marion, any knowledge of an object entails a causal explanation. For every objective phenomenal occurrence, there is a corresponding causal effect. Marion explains that an object phenomenon, “its passage to actuality results from a cause, to which it is by principle tied as an effect, able in its turn to take up the function of cause with regard to another object.”²⁴ The last feature is the object’s possibility which presupposes its actuality. Marion says, “an object is actual only because it is possible, it is possible only by not contradicting itself, and it does not contradict itself in its definition because it always remains comprehensible for a finite rationality (ours).”²⁵ We know the possibility of being a bachelor, 1 + 4, and failing all courses in a semester. These possibilities are comprehensible because they are self-evident or axiomatic, which can be “repeated and reproduced, precisely because said essence can produce the object at will as an effect.”²⁶ They are in themselves teleologically determined. One knows the bush from a tree and a fish from a reptile. Marion asserts that:

The object allows itself to be known exactly because its definition consists precisely in allowing itself to be known exactly—the remainder, which cannot be led back to exactitude and to its permanence, is sent away to the indeterminate domain of ‘subjectivity.’²⁷

These categorical features distinguish the object from the subject phenomenon. However, Marion describes the object’s phenomenality as something impoverished. While the object is assured by its “chief privilege,”

²¹ *Ibid.*, §25, 156.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §25, 159.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, §25, 156–157.

i.e., its mode of certainty, its “phenomenal impoverishment lies in the fact that it must in this way satisfy the conditions of possibility, which of course guarantee its appearing.”²⁸ For this to be possible, the object submits itself to the regulations set by “the standards of reason.” In short, the object is judged by the a priori norms.²⁹ Marion thinks that the object phenomena satisfy the Cartesian and Kantian demands of the method, which requires “clarity and distinction of evident knowledge,” which “produce more certain, proven, and recordable knowledge.”³⁰

The subject-type or non-objective phenomenon is different. It is mainly characterized by “its contingency, its mutability, its reluctance to be qualified—in a word, its incomprehensibility.”³¹ Given this, as such cannot be objectified, quantified, foreseen (its essence), repeatable, reproduced, or unified. Marion describes its phenomenality as “an event,” “enigmatic,” “surprising,” “an actuality without cause, autonomous, spontaneous,” and “at the margins of knowledge and quasi-irrational.”³² In contrast to the objective type that is transparent, comprehensible, controllable, reproducible, foreseeable, and finite, the non-objective type “does not remain, does not persist, does not perdure, but comes about and passes; thus, it always imposes itself.”³³ These characteristics indicate non-metaphysical attributes. The non-objective phenomenon imposes into the recipient its qualities or attributes. In contrast, the constituting agent imposes the essential properties of the objective phenomenon, thereby securing the object’s distinction, clarity, and certainty. In the case of the non-objective phenomenon, we become passive recipients and witnesses of a phenomenon’s sudden arrival.

Hence, the distinctive characteristics of non-objective phenomena assume that they are irreducible to plain objective type. Contrary to Kant’s view, some phenomena are outside the governing conditions of possible experience as determined by intuition and concept.³⁴ Some of these phenomena, “that which cannot become an object falls outside the sphere of the knowable,”³⁵ according to Marion, “happen as events.”³⁶ One of these events is the human person. Hence, the human person as the “subjective type” phenomenon possesses such attributes identified by Marion. The

²⁸ *Ibid.*, §25, 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §25, 163.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §25, 157.

³¹ *Ibid.*, §25, 156.

³² *Ibid.*, §25, 159.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For the discussion on the conditions for the possible cognition of an object, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A93/B125, 224.

³⁵ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, §25, 156.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, §27, 178.

irreducibility and incomprehensibility of the human person as a subject-type phenomenon are based on the idea that the human person is a non-objectifiable being that requires infinite understanding. Our encounter with the individual in the world, either perceptual or not, as a concrete other produces intuition so rich and overwhelming that one cannot entirely totalize and reduce the other into something like a natural empirical object. Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, “the perceived world is not a sum of objects,”³⁷ some are non-objects. Marion’s distinction between the object and subject types of phenomena is closely linked with his account of the saturated phenomenon. A saturated phenomenon reveals a phenomenon’s dimension that remains unknown to us and delivers us a “negative certainty.” In short, what we are truly certain about is that we are uncertain of our knowledge of whatever appears to us subjectively. Such epistemic limitation, according to Gschwandtner, “functions as a broadening of knowledge in the sense of a negative certainty about their inherent unknowability.”³⁸

Marion’s analysis of two modes of phenomenality is based on the principles of givenness he developed. How he approached and described the non-object phenomenon shows the operation of the saturated phenomenon. Such a phenomenon, as Marion claims, is essentially characterized as an event that is an archetype of a saturated phenomenon. Unlike the object-type phenomenon, which is understood in the Cartesian and Kantian epistemic frameworks, Marion grounds his epistemic description of the subject-type phenomenon in the context of excess or saturated phenomena.

The Saturated Phenomenon

Among Marion’s most distinctive contributions to contemporary phenomenology is the concept of saturated phenomenon. It both attracts admiration and scorn from other phenomenological thinkers in France,³⁹

³⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences,” in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 12.

³⁸ Christina M. Gschwandtner, “Marion and Negative Certainty: Epistemological Dimensions of the Phenomenology of Givenness,” in *Philosophy Today*, 56:3 (2012), 365.

³⁹ Among his eminent critics is Dominique Janicaud who accuses Marion of “methodological displacement” because of the saturated phenomenon, which dismisses the limiting function of the horizon. See Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology,” trans. by Bernard G. Prusak, in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, Dominique Janicaud, Jean-François Courtine, Jean-Louis Chrétien, Jean-Luc Marion, Michel Henry, and Paul Ricoeur (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). However, Marion explains that the phenomenon is also “endowed with a certain ipseity or selfhood: it gives itself, it is not limited or delimited either by a phenomenological horizon nor by the limits of an I. It is, as it were, self-constituting.” Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a*

which, according to Marion's student Emmanuel Falque, is "just for the sake of making a splash."⁴⁰

To be sure, Marion does not claim that the saturated phenomenon was his invention. In fact, the concept, according to him, is present in Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger, only that it received less attention from them, underdeveloped, and thus partly unarticulated. Marion explains, "formally...it [saturated phenomenon] does not mark a revolution, but merely a development of one of the possibilities that are by right already inscribed within the commonly accepted definition of the phenomenon."⁴¹ Marion asserts that the saturated phenomenon challenges the limits of the mental categories we usually use when constituting something like an object or a thing. Central to it is the primacy of intuition over the epistemological and metaphysical constitution of a thing or an object. For Marion, contra Kant, "intuition is king."⁴² It is because any concept is a product of the given intuition; without intuition, no concept with content is possible. As Marion explains, "intuition without concept, although still blind, nevertheless already gives matter to an object. The concept without intuition, although not blind, nevertheless no longer sees anything since nothing has yet been given to it to be seen."⁴³ Intuition's kingly character, henceforth, is brought about by its power to provide an epistemic role to the whole "object of possible experience." In general, our human experience is only possible when there is intuition. It is given before being constituted. Similarly, we can think of a phenomenon that comprises our experience as given because, without it, no concept is formed and, as such, "is given only through intuition."⁴⁴

A saturated phenomenon, therefore, is an event by which the intuition we receive inundates our capacity to intend a particular experience, making intention inoperable. With this, it questions the subject's capacity to capture the phenomenon as an object fully experienced. Essentially, the saturated phenomenon accounts for a particular experience without using the subject's constituting power. In this case, a reversal takes place. The human person is constituted and a plain receiver of bedazzling intuitions, making

Phenomenology of Givenness, trans. by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), §22, 219.

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Falque, *The Loving Struggle: Phenomenological and Theological Debates*, trans. by Bradley B. Onishi and Lucas McCracken (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 98.

⁴¹ Jean-Luc Marion, "The Banality of Saturation," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 119.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

the person a mere witness of a phenomenon. The saturated phenomenon, therefore, appears to rub the subject of “epistemic integrity”⁴⁵ and full control.

The Human Person as Subject Phenomenon

Going back, Marion’s approach to the phenomenon of the human person is framed based on his views of the phenomenality of phenomena and the saturated phenomenon, among others. Relating such views to his claim of the human person as an evental phenomenon leads us to suppose that the human person is undefinable and non-objectifiable in the sense that the human person must be thought of as a subject irreducible to any object of knowledge and as an enigma to himself. In the opening paragraph of his first essay in *Negative Certainties*, Marion says, “I am not always exactly insofar as I think, since I do not think exclusively that I am, nor clearly what I am, nor, for that matter, based on where I am.”⁴⁶ The indefinability of the human person is based upon the notion of the excess of intuition that saturates the person, paralyzing the person’s capacity to fully constitute one’s whatness and who-ness. The human person as a phenomenon cannot be constituted as an object of my knowledge since it gives excessively that I become helpless to constitute what I essentially am. The revelation of the human in the unfolding of a series of events does not secure the adequation nor the materiality and comprehensibility of the self’s identity. Marion, speaking about some phenomena as events, explains that:

If we do not comprehend them, we must not conclude that they do not occur or appear, and even less that we do not know them, but only that they comprehend us because they exceed the condition of an object enveloped by a gaze. Not all phenomena are reduced to objects; certain phenomena happen as events.⁴⁷

In this case, the human person as a phenomenon falls within the event category, which is irreducible, unquantifiable, unpredictable, and infinite. For Marion to strengthen his claims of the infinity and indefinability of the human person, he returns to St. Augustine, who, contrary to the standard view according to Marion, is the source of the proto-phenomenological account of the self’s unknowability.

⁴⁵ Kristof Oltvai, “Another Name for Liberty: Revelation, ‘Objectivity,’ and Intellectual Freedom in Barth and Marion,” in *Open Theology*, 5 (2019), 434.

⁴⁶ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, §2, 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, §27, 178.

In Marion's phenomenological reading of St. Augustine's, *The Confessions*, he refers to a famous line from Book X: "For in your sight I have become a riddle to myself, and that is my infirmity."⁴⁸ For Marion, this realization is revealed by the *cogito*, which Augustine believes allows one to become a question to oneself (*mihi quaestio mihi factum sum*).⁴⁹ In other words, our knowledge of ourselves is opaque. My mere thinking of myself does not reveal my closeness to myself instead, it shows my distance from myself. Marion explains that the *cogito*

teaches me that in thinking, I am put at a distance from myself and become other than *I myself*, that in thinking, I do not enter into possession of any *myself* that could exactly and truly say itself saying *I*, that the more I think myself (and the more I am by thinking), the more unknowing I become of who I am and alienated from myself.⁵⁰

Here, Marion finds Augustine's statement strongly opposes Cartesian *cogito*, which promises certitude. While Cartesian *cogito* assures and certifies one's knowledge of oneself (hence, as an object), the Augustinian *cogito* alienates and "exiles me outside of myself."⁵¹ Against Descartes's claim of self-discovery, Augustine's *cogito* denotes an excess of the given phenomenon to the point that he "does not know his essence and can never say (himself), rigorously, *myself*."⁵² As John Rist puts it, "as soon as we begin to think about ourselves, we diminish that 'whole' about which we are thinking."⁵³ The statement, "this *I* that I am cannot nor should not, by definition, be known as an object; thus, *I* do not coincide with the *me* that I know, and I do not know the *I* that I am,"⁵⁴ captures the distance I had from myself and its unknowability.

⁴⁸ St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans., John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 10.30.50.262.

⁴⁹ Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. by Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), § 10, 64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, §10, 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ John Rist, "What Will I Be Like Tomorrow? Augustine versus Hume," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 74: 1 (Winter 2000), <<https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq200074117>>, 95.

⁵⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena*, trans. by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 11.

A Broadening of Reason as a Response to a Nihilistic Event of Our Time

Reflecting on the current preoccupations of contemporary French phenomenologists, one of which is the status of reason,⁵⁵ Marion, among others, tries to address this concern in his phenomenological works.

In *Negative Certainties*, he reminds us of our desire or obsession with knowledge, i.e., “to know with certainty...even if nihilism often makes us almost give up on the ambition of attaining a genuine science.”⁵⁶ That is why for Marion, we are Cartesians “whether we want to be or not, and whether we know it or not.”⁵⁷ But, against this Cartesian current, Marion intends to broaden the scope of reason by opening some spaces for a “plurivocal rationality that is not reducible to the mind’s capacity to measure objects,”⁵⁸ which runs contrary to the “modern univocal method of knowing.”⁵⁹ The said method is of Cartesian descent, rooted in Descartes’s principle of *mathesis universalis* and order and measure which is sustained and prevalent in the exact sciences. But also in Descartes, we find him telling us that there are things that one wants to know that “wholly exceeds the grasp of the human mind,”⁶⁰ but still can be demonstrated negatively such that it reveals that one’s intellectual capacity is limited to a certain extent. But this does not mean, for Marion, that such realization renders us ignorant. Instead, being certain of uncertainty is a species of knowledge equally the same with epistemic certitude because knowledge admits “a matter of degrees.”⁶¹ Marion calls this type of knowledge “without object” or, in other words, “without certainty.”⁶² From the general view of knowledge, Marion proceeds by giving an account of reason essential to knowledge formation and acquisition. The broadening of reason in Marion’s thought is the acceptance and inclusion of what he calls the “rationality of charity” which for him is “more powerful, but also more secret and paradoxical,”⁶³ than the speculative (metaphysical) reason and calculating (scientific) reason (scientific).

⁵⁵ Tarek R. Dika and W. Chris Hackett, *Quiet Powers of the Possible: Interviews in Contemporary French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 1.

⁵⁶ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, §1, 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Taylor Knight, “The Intimate and the Impossible: Analogy without Similitude in Jean-Luc Marion” (PhD Dissertation: University of Oxford, UK, 2016), ii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁶⁰ Rene Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), ATX 400, 32.

⁶¹ Marion, *Negative Certainties*, §1, 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Marion, Jean-Luc Marion, *Believing in Order to See: On the Rationality of Revelation and the Irrationality of Some Believers*, trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 18.

His account of reason is hinged in the context of his critique and overcoming of metaphysics and the event of nihilism. Metaphysics and nihilism are two primary reasons for him to pierce through the fortress of reason as secured by metaphysics. By metaphysics, Marion understands it as “the system of philosophy from Suarez to Kant as a single science bearing at one and the same time on the universal common being and on being (or beings) par excellence.”⁶⁴ Lately, Marion expounds his definition of metaphysics, saying that it is “first, that Being amounts to beings insofar as beings are present. To be present is to persist, to be self-identical (principle of identity), to be in time, that is, to be is to be as long as you can: the *conatus essendi* as preservation *in suo esse*.”⁶⁵ Along with metaphysics is nihilism which for Marion brought “a long and rich crisis”⁶⁶ to a metaphysical ordination of reason. Such an unfortunate fate is seen in Nietzsche’s attempt to deconstruct the “foundations of rationality,” and its “possibility in general of any primordial grounding.”⁶⁷ Nietzsche, according to Marion, puts into question the “two fundamental principles of rationality,” i.e., the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. With this, he turned the ground of rationality sterile and superfluous, leading to the “crisis of grounding.”⁶⁸ The same principles become a central polemic for Marion in his critique of metaphysics. These, among others, such as a “need for certainty, ontology, causality, and perfect presence,”⁶⁹ are Marion’s target of his critique of metaphysics.

Therefore, the broadening of the scope of reason makes it possible when metaphysical restrictions are lifted, allowing for a reception of other forms of knowledge and knowing undetermined by and beyond the control of metaphysical principles. He finds in phenomenology a promising deliverance of the broadening of reason since it is through phenomenology that one can truly resist or overcome metaphysics, at least from Marion’s viewpoint. He claims that phenomenology does not do and go beyond metaphysics. He notes that when a philosophical inquiry does not involve *a priori* conditions or determinations such as the principles of sufficient reason,

⁶⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 51. Steven DeLay describes Marion’s use of the term “metaphysics” as an “art for the history of philosophy, insofar as that history constricts all appearing to the mode of the object or being.” Steven DeLay, *Phenomenology in France: A Philosophical and Theological Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 95, n. 1.

⁶⁵ Dika and Hackett, *Quiet Powers of the Possible*, 51.

⁶⁶ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 15.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 72.

identity, and teleology, such inquiry does not deal with metaphysics. Phenomenology, in this case, is excepted. He states, "Phenomenology goes beyond metaphysics insofar as it gives up the transcendental project in order to allow the development of empiricism that is finally radical – finally radical because it no longer limits itself to sensible intuition but admits all originally donating intuition."⁷⁰ He finds support from Claude Romano, who affirms the relevance of broadening reason in phenomenological inquiry, saying, "What phenomenology brought as its main contribution to contemporary philosophy is a renewed image of Reason."⁷¹ He means that contemporary phenomenology advances "a new concept of reason: a big-hearted reason that rehabilitates sensibility, perception, affectivity as being structured by essential necessities and bringing, therefore, their own contribution to rationality, as being necessary to its existence."⁷² Phenomenology, thus, offers a way out from the impasse of metaphysics.

Furthermore, Marion's critique against the metaphysical view of reason is based on its assumed imperial function to command the limits of the appearance of a phenomenon. The limitation is set by the metaphysical principles which condition every possible experience. For instance, the possibility of knowing the being or the existence or essence of something is conditioned by the law of identity, non-contradiction, and sufficient reason. Such possibility of experience is determined by what Marion calls the "conditions posited for every phenomenon."⁷³ It means that no experience is made possible without the guiding principles of metaphysics, which secure the grounds for the possibility of experience. It is clear in Kant that metaphysics is essential in delivering scientific knowledge. The reason why Kant wanted to rehabilitate metaphysics as a science is to certify that any experience we claim to know is not just scientific but made possible because of the conditions set up by metaphysics as their foundation. So, Marion tries to liberate reason from the metaphysical shackles that oppress and suppress reason's other potent capacities. The liberation of reason from metaphysical restrictions requires the operation of the saturated phenomenon as a methodological tool because it serves as a paradigm "that can move us beyond metaphysics."⁷⁴

Equally important to Marion's project of broadening the sphere of reason is the overcoming of nihilism, which can be done by overcoming

⁷⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, "Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology," trans. by Thomas A. Carlson, in *Critical Inquiry*, 20:4 (Summer 1994), 582.

⁷¹ Claude Romano, "From Event to Selfhood: An Intellectual Journey," in *Gadamer Lecture Series* (10 February 2020), 4–5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷³ Marion, *Being Given*, 181.

⁷⁴ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 59.

metaphysics, as Marion argued. He describes nihilism, *pace* Nietzsche and Heidegger, as an event of devaluation of the highest or greatest values. Nihilism's rationality is ideological, and some features are expressed in such forms as "rationality without radical grounding, thus with neither reference nor pretension to truth," "instrumentalization," "plurality," "competition," and "totalitarian hegemony."⁷⁵ These nihilistic ideological expressions marginalize transcendental values such as truth, the good, and the beautiful. Thus, amid this crisis, reason must pass through it. Marion believes this crisis will last longer than expected, so we must bear with it. But he also suspects that "maybe nihilism still belongs to reason, or at least to its metaphysical era,"⁷⁶ thus, "a fact of reason itself,"⁷⁷ which any attempt to condemn or overcome it "by an even greater affirmative power,"⁷⁸ without cutting off its root from the ground, is a mistake because it would just deepen the ideological grounding and would further cement the "logic of nihilism all the more strictly."⁷⁹ Rather, Marion suggests, we must endure and resist it until we come to a point where metaphysics has been overcome.⁸⁰ The point, therefore, is that we cannot overcome nihilism without first unrooting its cause which, for Marion, is metaphysics. To overcome nihilism, one must be ready to dislodge and deprive metaphysics of its power over reason. In this case, Marion temporarily recommends a model of rationality, which he thinks resists nihilism. He calls it "communicational rationality."⁸¹ A rationality with a "zero degree"⁸² status. This sort of rationality counters nihilistic rationality. Marion explains that:

this model of rationality develops its zero degree because it presupposes no unhypothetical grounding (empirical or a priori), nor any self-showing truth (as in phenomenology); in short, there are no preliminaries. Indeed, this is why it can be exercised even in the situation of nihilism. Its formal poverty coincides with its privilege.⁸³

⁷⁵ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 15–16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 28.

⁸¹ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 20.

⁸² Marion explains, "because truth no longer precedes reason in order to regulate it (by an adequation of the understanding with truth, in whatever sense one might understand it), but inversely so that reason, reinforced through debates and arguments, precedes and produces truth." Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 20.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

His articulation of this model is based on the Habermasian context of rationality that is communicative. Such a model shows resistance against a nihilistic rationality. Marion thinks that the crisis of reason in the time of nihilism “comes from afar and will probably last a long time.”⁸⁴

However, Marion, while acknowledging the opportunities and the practical worthiness result of the model offers,⁸⁵ also finds it insufficient as “it allows for yet another new ideological drift,”⁸⁶ which is again symptomatic of nihilism and “the renunciation of any normative ambition, which is essential for a communicational model of rationality.”⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the model, for Marion, may still offer a temporary praxiological refuge against nihilism. I will not go further in detail as it requires a comprehensive discussion. I want to point out that Marion finds such a model of rationality a valuable form of reason that can defy the strong current of nihilism.

Therefore, drawing from these two primary sources of impediment to the broadening of reason, the implications of such limitations can now be discerned clearly. The first is reducing human experience to reifiable phenomena, which can lead to what Marion considers “the devaluation of all values and to succumbing to ideology.”⁸⁸ He refers to the human face and the flesh as irreducible phenomena that we try to reduce to plain positive scientific knowledge and ideology. When their irreducible natures are discounted, it can lead to nihilism because, essentially, they belong to non-objective phenomena when no amount of speculative and scientific determinations can fully account for them.

Given the obvious totalizing function of speculative and scientific reason, Marion introduced charity or love as a form of reason, so great that it can rescue knowledge of non-objective phenomenon from eternal concealment and irrelevance. As Marion asserts, “only this love can give access to the great reason.”⁸⁹

Like Heidegger and Levinas, who complained that Western philosophy forgets the question of Being, and ethics (or Other), respectively,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁸⁵ A sort of noteworthy result of this model of rationality, according to Marion, is as follows: (a) “it straightaway abandons any ideologization of rationality because it publicly unfolds its argumentative procedures, and thus experiences at the same time their limits and validities”; (b) and consequently, [it] condemns as a nonargumentative violence the tactic of suspicion and of intimidation, which always asks before any argument of the adversary and in order not to listen to him or her: ‘From where do you speak?’—which amounts to telling him or her to be silent.” Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

for Marion, it is “the forgetting of the erotics of wisdom.”⁹⁰ The forgetfulness or blindness of philosophy towards love is attributed to the metaphysical determination of the philosophical inquiry, which excludes love as its subject matter and relegates the phenomenon to mere passion. Metaphysics denies any rationality or analytic characteristic of love and subordinates the understanding of love to “the questions of being and of knowledge.”⁹¹ In other words, philosophy as metaphysics sees multiplicity rather than unity in love, “philosophy simultaneously refused love’s unity, its rationality, and its primacy (and to begin with, its primacy over being).”⁹² That is why Marion asserts both at the beginning and the end of the book *Erotic Phenomenon* that “love is only told in *one way*,”⁹³ that *eros* and *agape* “are not a matter of two loves but of two names selected among an infinity of others to think and to say the one love.”⁹⁴ It means that any form of love directed to various people (or even God, “God loves in the same way as we do,”⁹⁵) in different levels of relationships remains univocal. He also asserts that “*love without being*” is the proper horizon of the erotic phenomenon free from metaphysical restrictions. With this methodological move, Marion wants to show that the phenomenon of love and its unity can still be secured within the field of philosophical view even without metaphysics as its beacon of light.

Love forms a different figure of reason, a “greater rationality,” which Marion calls an “*erotic rationality*.”⁹⁶ This form of rationality is thought to precede and exceed metaphysical rationality. The point is that when we revisit the meaning of the very definition of philosophy, it is there that love reveals its own logic, which precedes knowing or understanding. When we say the love of wisdom, it implies that what conditions one for knowing something or acquiring knowledge of things is achieved through love. In other words, one must first love in order to know. This view of love sets Marion apart from others,⁹⁷ aside from the fact that for him, love is a phenomenon rather than an order of feeling, emotion, or intention as commonly understood. Love as knowledge finds its reason in the unfolding of the experience of love where love gives knowledge, that love “enables us

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹¹ Claude Romano, “Love in Its Concept,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. by Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 319.

⁹² Jean-Luc Marion, *Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. by Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁷ Robyn Horner, “The Weight of Love,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. by Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 236.

to know,” and “enables us to recognize love [itself], and we only know by choosing to love.”⁹⁸

That said, the operation of love or charity destabilizes the foundation of the metaphysical fortress that secures the ground of reason. What love or charity aims to accomplish, in Marion’s mind, is to reclaim its position and certify its legitimacy as a species of reason which opens promising epistemic horizons that delivers knowledge the speculative and scientific reason failed to furnish. Marion explains that love’s reason is “a forceful, original, simple reason that sees and says what common reason misses and does not see—it would already have saved, if not humans, at least their reason.”⁹⁹ Its reason then unfolds its own logic. Marion recapitulates his phenomenological reflection of love from *Erotic Phenomenon* to his other work *Believing in Order to See*, where he identifies four laws of love’s reason: certainty, possibility, self-knowledge, and alterity. There is certainty in love such that love “always loves without condition, never on condition, in particular not on the condition of reciprocity.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, love promises and guarantees that the lover is certain of the love being shared with the beloved even if the beloved does not return it. As Marion notes, “Love does not require a return on its investment in order to love... a love one refuses or scorns, in short a love that is not returned, remains no less a gift given.”¹⁰¹ With this comes possibility as a law of love’s reason. Possibility impedes the impossible from happening. Marion explains that in love, “nothing is impossible...especially the ability to love without regard of persons...because love requires only itself in order to love.”¹⁰² It reminds us of the Gospel of Luke 6:27–35 when Christ commands his disciples and listeners to love one’s enemy—a gesture of unconditional love. Even the most unlovable being must be loved when one truly loves for the sake of love. This logic of love’s reason also secures our self-knowledge, not on the ground of thought but on love. One knows who and what one is by loving unconditionally. Here, Marion thinks we can escape the “illusion of thought” and “the suspicion of nihilism” grounded on the *cogito* or the *I* that thinks of itself by, with, and through itself. Lastly, Marion speaks of alterity as another element of the logic of love’s reason. It explains how love alone promises knowledge of the other as another and not as a mere representation of the other. “What it loves will appear to it to the exact extent to which, by loving it, it will aim at it, and, by aiming at it, it will move itself into it,”¹⁰³ Marion explains. These laws of love’s reason properly

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁹⁹ Marion, *Believing in Order to See*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

account for some non-objective phenomena with a degree of rigor like the other forms of reason. However, what distinguishes love's reason from other forms is its capacity to properly account (logos) rationally those phenomena marked as outside the realm of metaphysical reason.

The Salience of the Human Person as a Phenomenon and the Broadening of Reason to Phenomenological Ethics

Speaking of ethical concerns or problems implies understanding one's lived experience. Since experience is phenomenological, its dimensions, what appears and how it appears, are essential aspects of phenomenological descriptions. John Bengtsson comments, "The interest of phenomenology is directed towards the investigation of lived experience and its content."¹⁰⁴ A moral experience is no exception. The remarks of Mark Sanders and J. Jeremy Wisneski on the essentiality of phenomenology to moral philosophizing are telling here:

Any attempt to grapple with an ethical issue, or to construct an ethical theory, will need to make contact with such experience [experience of value] – whether to draw from it, to vindicate it, or to have some court of appeal in which differences of value might be adjudicated. It is the ineliminability of experience to thinking through, let alone resolving, moral issues that makes phenomenology essential to moral theorizing and problem solving.¹⁰⁵

In other words, reflecting on and taking experience seriously is inescapable if we want to engage in ethical or moral inquiry responsibly. When we speak of phenomenological ethics, we usually do not mean providing some action-guiding rules or principles for moral or ethical assessment or prescriptive recommendations to moral dilemmas or pressing moral issues like abortion, capital punishment, or wealth distribution. Rather, such an approach to ethics intends to enrich moral philosophy with valuable descriptions of moral experiences useful in developing a more nuanced, robust, and comprehensive ethical or moral vision. In other words, since

¹⁰⁴ John Bengtsson, "Phenomenological Ethics, A Historical Outline," in *Phenomenology World-Wide: Foundations—Expanding Dynamics—Life-Engagements (A Guide for Research and Study)*, ed. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002), 521.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Sanders and J. Jeremy Wisnewski, "Introduction," in *Ethics and Phenomenology*, ed. by Mark Sanders and J. Jeremy Wisnewski (New York: Lexington Books, 2012), 1.

phenomenology is understood as a descriptive inquiry, many believe it offers metaethical resources. It does not provide normative claims for moral or ethical action. But somehow provide descriptions as materials for considerations in developing normative ethical or moral frameworks. Perhaps, we can claim that the distinction between description and prescription must be reconsidered because, as a product of a metaphysical dualism (fact versus value) is no longer tenable, as shown in the works of John Searle and Hilary Putnam.¹⁰⁶ In short, while phenomenology directly provides fecund descriptive accounts of moral or ethical concepts such as responsibility, freedom, value, moral sense, good, volition, and moral knowledge, which, in principle, are clearly metaethical concerns, it does not mean that these concepts do not play a valuable role in shaping the character or force of normative ethics. For one to say, like Levinas, that “you shall not kill” or one is responsible for the other, it does not simply describe an action of responsibility but of commanding the person to act (normative character) fulfilling such moral responsibility. In other words, what I want to argue is that there is a relation between the metaethical, or descriptive ethics and normative ethics and such relationship has to do with guiding the other in forming normative policies to regulate one’s ethical or moral actions. It does not mean that the ethical thoughts we derived from Marion directly provides a normative framework for moral or ethical assessment. Rather, a broader understanding of moral experience, human person, and reason can facilitate a more comprehensive view when making or formulating normative guidelines for ethical actions. In the case of the human person, what this study shows is the inadequate account of understanding the human person as seen in the way the dominant normative ethical frameworks understood the human person. For instance, the human person as a rational being as the basis for moral principles is insufficient foundation of a normative moral theory as such theory valorizes or glorifies the human person as the primary consideration for moral assessment. Thus, this form of normative theory remains human-centered and its application to other non-human beings renders insufficient.¹⁰⁷

The ethical dimension in the works of phenomenologists like Jean-Luc Marion avoid articulating a phenomenological reflection on ethics or making explicit moral avowals. But a closer examination of their texts helps

¹⁰⁶ See John Searle, “How to Derive ‘Ought’ From ‘Is’,” in *The Philosophical Review*, 73:1 (January 1964), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2183201>>.

¹⁰⁷ Some moral thinkers have developed non-human-centered normative frameworks, such as Paul Taylor’s theory of biocentrism and Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic.” See Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

us discern the ethical thoughts and moral resources found in them. In the case of Marion, the concepts discussed above show how those salient concepts have ethical aspects or dimensions quite useful in deepening our understanding of ethics, the nature of its inquiry, and moral reasoning.

Marion contends that our experience of ourselves, others, and anything in-between shows the irreducibility of the human person to object or being. It means that the category of the human person belongs to a different kind, a non-metaphysical category—a non-objective phenomenon or event. With this, such an experience gives us a resource for a broader understanding of the profundity of human life. In the context of ethical or moral experience, examining the context of moral codes, ethical principles, and norms abstracted based on objective and pure logical or conceptual analysis without integrating elements informed and produced by non-objective experience shows a lack of a concrete force to deal with moral issues and problems comprehensively. Take the case of mainstream ethical frameworks like utilitarianism and deontology, which usually serve as moral frameworks for making moral decisions. While these frameworks set up rules for action, these rules exclude some salient considerations, such as the human being as maker of moral contexts or situations and the use of reason outside the panopticon of metaphysics. By “maker of moral contexts,” I mean that a human agent contributes to forming a moral context or situation but is not exclusively or solely generated or directed by them. Any moral situation or context also involves other agents and forces that help shape a moral case. Following the phenomenological lexicon of Marion, a moral situation is a phenomenon that may render the moral agent as one among the actors in a moral stage that is sometimes helpless and a mere witness when a moral phenomenon gives too much of itself. In this case, the moral agent decides without certainty—not due to mere epistemic ignorance but because of an overwhelming intuition presented to them; a bit of moral luck may ensue.

Surely, some moral issues or cases are so banal that a moral agent or an ethical person making a moral assessment can easily resolve or navigate a situation without difficulty. But some moral scenarios or cases are too complex that keenness to a situation, mastery of moral rules or principles, and sharpness of reasoning is insufficient for moral deliberation. In such cases, a broader view of the moral agent (the human person in particular, which does not mean offering a normative guideline) and the use of reason may help augment the comprehensibility of the overall moral situations. An analogy could better explain the point. A Rubik’s cube on the table can be seen wholly without perceiving all its sides. We infer the unseen profiles with certitude by intention, knowing that those profiles are of the cube, not something else. Some profiles are immediately perceived as we perceive a cube, but these are according to perspective. It means one sees those profiles

from a particular location, angle, distance, and conditions. Hence, a perception of a cube is perspectival, depending on where the person is sitting, the angle seen, the condition of the room, and the distance from the cube. However, it does not mean that the cube appears partially. Rather, the cube appears in its entirety to the perceiver. Similarly, in moral experience, we encounter the same process. We experience a particular moral phenomenon, analyze it, and make a moral decision or judgment. This is a common process when dealing with moral experiences or situations. With this, moral philosophers develop various frameworks for navigating the moral deliberation process. However, some dominant frameworks fail to notice a few important considerations in moral deliberation. For instance, utilitarianism, despite its simplicity and intuitiveness, still lacks a more nuanced view of the moral agent, the nature of happiness as its basis of moral valuation, and the paradoxical character of its basic principle (the greatest happiness for a greater number) to be more comprehensive and less reductive. The human agency should be seen in a new light, given the reassessment of the status of the human subject by the Western contemporary European philosophical tradition, which led to the overthrowing of the human subject from its imperial throne as the sole arbiter of knowledge and the reference point of all various conditions. In other words, further understanding and grasping the nuances of those moral or ethical concepts is a descriptive activity.

In Marion, this is seen in how his anti-Kantian standpoint displaced the subject to prove that ethical frameworks are not solely determined by and formulated for the human subject but rather can be seen in the light of ethical phenomenality, i.e., the subject as a witness of a phenomenon. In this decentering or re-positioning, Marion hopes to challenge rationality informed by metaphysical determinations (such as the principles of sufficient reason and identity) as the guiding lights of an ethical framework, which are too formal and empty with content (a criticism against Kantian ethics).¹⁰⁸ His rejection of metaphysics and his critique of nihilism imply overcoming moribund ethics from the tyranny of metaphysics. His articulations of concepts such as the human person as a phenomenon of event, love and its reason, the human flesh, other, and the face, among others, reveal how moral discourse is possible without any recourse to the metaphysical grounding of such. We may also say that Marion offers a kind of ethical insight that reinforces an enriching manner of ethical inquiry that includes not just

¹⁰⁸ Such a criticism against Kant remains within the level of descriptive ethics since Marion challenges the foundation of the metaphysics of morals of Kant which is a metaethical inquiry into morality. See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

human interests and concerns but the interests of non-human living beings. In other words, the broadening of moral reasoning and ethical inquiry should no longer be centered on human interest but on the interests of all living organisms, as these living organisms are also part of our moral experience. An example of this is an ethical inquiry into the environment. The dominant normative ethical frameworks like deontology and utilitarianism need to be revisited or learn from the phenomenological approach to ethics to address the ethical or moral concerns on the environment. I do not mean that ethical thoughts derived from Marion's phenomenological reflection on some salient concepts can be developed or formed as a normative framework. Rather, those ethical ideas may guide us in developing a normative framework that fully accommodates moral considerations for non-human beings. While philosophers tend to force, extend, or re-engineer the moral frameworks of utilitarianism, deontological ethics, and virtues ethics to environmental moral issues, they still need to be improved (what to improve is its foundation, which is the reexamination of the metaethical concepts where the framework is founded). The point is that when confronted with a given phenomenon, if such a phenomenon lets itself be revealed without any condition, the ethical frameworks we use fail to account so many intuitions.

Conclusion

The discussion above on Marion's phenomenological concepts—such as the human person and reason, as understood within the framework of his main phenomenological tools, such as the saturated phenomenon, its archetypes, such as love or charity, and the two forms of phenomenality—reveal how his thoughts may be of use to further examine, if not challenge, the foundational orientation of meta-ethical and normative ethical frameworks. We have learned from Marion's critique of metaphysics and nihilism that ethical perspectives and theories are all designed and grounded on metaphysical principles. Thus, they can hardly widen the scope of their inquiry and some other considerations through practical reason. What Marion's account of the irreducibility of the human person and the broadening of human reason show is that ethical inquiry and reasoning are limited because they are framed based on the view that the human person is a mere objective phenomenon and that we can fully understand who and what a person is. Contrary to this is the idea of Marion that the human person is a subjective or non-objective phenomenon that we cannot fully comprehend.

Moreover, in the postmodern age, the person is no longer a "crowning king" who is the source or the reference point of all values. Instead, the human person is among other significant and equally valuable

agents, factors, or actors in different spheres of action, such as moral or ethical. In other words, ethical frameworks should no longer assume that human concerns or interests are central or greater than those of others. These others are not necessarily human others. It could be non-human living beings, structures, or institutions. In short, moral decision-makers should reconsider operating their reasoning within the bounds of human-centered ethics. We should understand, against dogmatic claims to moral judgments, the tentativeness of moral judgments because although moral phenomenon always appears and gives itself fully, it does not guarantee that it is entirely received as well.

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Book Review

**Sloterdijk, Peter,
*Der Staat streifte seine Samthandschuhe
ab. Ausgewählte Gespräche und Beiträge
2020–2021*¹**

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland

Despite it feeling eerie to speak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the past tense, we are now able to mull over what transpired specifically the first two years, how we, both as individuals and states alike, reacted to the pandemic's development. It is on this point that the current book under review comes into the picture. Translated into English as *The State Removed its Velvet Gloves*, the 15 selected talks and interviews of Peter Sloterdijk given in 2020–2021, which comprise this book, probe the unmasking or, better put, ungloving of the contemporary state's gentleness, evident in its stringent hold considered as pandemic measures. All chapters bar four (two for both English and French) originally appear in German, yet I provide their titles' translation: (1) The Western system turns out to be equally authoritarian as the Chinese. An interview with Christophe Ono-dit-Biot; (2) There is no place left for exaggerations. An interview with Adam Soboczynski; (3) Communism in the age of pandemics and climate change. An interview with Nathan Gardels; (4) Humans are not ready to protect nature. An interview with Neil King und Gabriel Borrud (3 and 4 being the only works to have originally appeared in English); (5) The human person, the distance-being; (6) The state shows its stern fist. An interview with Tomasz Kurianowicz; (7) Please explain to us the time in which we live! An interview with Willem Allexander Tell; (8) Is it legitimate to not fear Corona? An interview with Willem Allexander Tell; (9) Are we living beyond our means? An interview with Willem Allexander Tell; (10) Humor, a civic vaccine. An interview with Christophe Ono-dit-Biot; (11) On the discomfort in fiscal culture; (12) Living with Excuses. An interview with Lucius Maltzan und Simon Nehrer; (13) One cannot live in the riot. An interview with Lothar Schröder; (14) Why are more

¹ Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021, EPUB, 200pp.

and more people leaving reality? An interview with Peter Unfried und Harald Welzer; (15) Instead of an epilogue. Life in the Philosopher's Cave. An interview with René Scheu.

What we experienced in the country, especially in Metro Manila, was the military's mobilization, and the wartime rhetoric that roused it was something not peculiar to us as it was used by leaders around the world. This seemed to be a default reaction to any perceived threat, however, such direction made us fight the wrong war since the biological fiend had nothing to do with the military might but warranted a recognition of a deeper, primal need;² as Camus' *The Plague* and Boccaccio's *Dekameron* exceeded previous purchase records, another path surfaced during the pandemic, a focus on Labyrinthology, on the path to lead oneself out of the webs constructed in the mind.³ The quarantine experience forced each to confront oneself and to contend with an indefinite solitude. From Sloterdijk, one apprehends how a deeper focus on this would have allowed us to better know the differences and the effects of employing terms such as 'lockdown,' 'quarantine,' and even the designation of something as 'essential.' Perhaps through these differences, better policies could have been crafted or more apt recognition given to what was/is indeed vital.

However, the inability to do such stems from a deeper pathology, and the pandemic provided a new mask to Sloterdijk's treatment of cynicism, a new culmination to the world's cynicism away from that of the 80s.⁴ He rehearses his argument:

cynicism from above accrues when individuals believe that they are too powerful to play by the rules of the game – they play with the rules themselves. In cynicism from below, the acrimony of people has its say, the people believe that they are too disadvantaged to adhere to norms that are supposed to apply to everyone but appear to be designed for the better off.⁵

Even the Philippine experience gave testament to this when, for the first, politically advantageous individuals transgressed pandemic measures yet were treated lightly, and the second was also evident when the appellation of a 'frontliner' seemed to be trivialized from its initial medical

² See Sloterdijk, "Das westliche System wird sich als ebenso autoritär erweisen wie das chinesische," *Der Staat streifte seine Samthandschuhe ab. Ausgewählte Gespräche und Beiträge 2020–2021* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021), EPUB.

³ See *Ibid.*

⁴ See Sloterdijk, "Der Staat zeigt seine eiserne Faust," in *Ibid.*

⁵ Sloterdijk, "Der Mensch, das Distanzwesen," in *Ibid.* Trans. is mine.

association to its extension in various sectors. What is insightful to consider now is how both sides benefited from how media supported, downplayed, or even exaggerated their claims. One may even say that our own labyrinths were/are enlarged through media's exaggerations—be it the psychological impact of social media's explosion through influencers or superstars or mass media's ability to direct a population's political attention.⁶ However, media's capacity to exaggerate and explode information is not a pandemic novelty, and in retrospect, this may have been a reason why some political figures and their followers easily downplayed the virus.⁷ Sloterdijk comments that, "the production of recklessness is the main task of media constructions of reality[.]" and "with the pandemic struck the hour of the wrong strong men: Trump, Bolsonaro, and Johnson believed strength was shown in recklessness."⁸ Away from such recklessness, the pandemic for him left no room for exaggerations due to the precise requirements of medical reports and scientific research and also due to the clear imperative and responsibility of immunitary reason (*immunitäre Vernunft*) not to instances of domination but to our spheres of co-immunism.⁹ Despite containing a positive aspect, he criticizes the number-attention too for such numerical focus displays the structural cynicism involved in the attention given to statistical figures now when the same number of deaths have been previously reported as casualties of war, cancer and other diseases, along with accidents and murders yet not given enough attention.¹⁰ Also, what surfaced was a corresponding cynical

⁶ See Sloterdijk, "Bitte erklären Sie uns die Zeit, in der wir leben!," in *Ibid.*

⁷ See Sloterdijk, "Für Übertreibungen ist kein Platz mehr," in *Ibid.* Sloterdijk mentions how humanity lives in a great media theory seminar (*medientheoretisches Seminar*) and how monothematism (*Monothematismus*) arises during states of emergencies. Yet, and rather unfortunately, these states of emergencies are at times exaggerated not because of the need or clamor of the movement but due to those surrounding it. What makes a topic dominate public space at times is the degree of exaggeration injected into the discourse that makes any rhetoric closer to right-wing politics, especially when anticipation of a political messiah is induced, something unfortunately happening throughout the world. (See Sloterdijk, "Man kann nicht in der Revolte leben," in *Ibid.*) The political regard of the pandemic as mere exaggeration may be considered here: Natalie Colarossi, "8 times world leaders downplayed the coronavirus and put their countries at greater risk for infection," *Business Insider* (11 April 2020), <<https://www.businessinsider.com/times-world-leaders-downplayed-the-coronavirus-threat-2020-4>> and V. Ponizovskiy, et al., "Why is right-wing media consumption associated with lower compliance with COVID-19 measures?," in *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 35, no. 1 (2023), 3–16, <<https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000337>>.

⁸ Sloterdijk, "Warum treten zunehmend Leute aus der Wirklichkeit aus?," and "Bitte erklären Sie uns die Zeit, in der wir leben!," in *Der Staat streifte seine Samthandschuhe ab*. Trans. is mine. For the Strong Men political approach, see also Sloterdijk, "Statt eines Nachworts. Leben in der Philosophenhöhle."

⁹ See Sloterdijk, "Für Übertreibungen ist kein Platz mehr" and "Ko-Immunismus im Zeitalter von Pandemien und Klimawandel," in *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See Sloterdijk, "Leben wir über unsere Verhältnisse?," in *Ibid.*

fetish for the latest number cult [*Zahlenkult*], the desire to know the latest tally, as if those are mere statistical figures without corresponding to actual bereavements.¹¹

We ought to ask ourselves now what we have learned (or not) from the pandemic. Sloterdijk's musings point a couple out that perhaps we can currently answer differently: he shows that we have not learned to accept death, perhaps easier under religious auspices, especially those who are placed at the forefronts of either a microbiological or actual war, and maybe this stems from an unrestricted greed for life;¹² we have not learned to be patient, since the pandemic required patience and such capacity is not borne of contemporary, instant times;¹³ we have not learned to expect more from the state, specifically with the looming neo-imperial arrangements on the global stage by leading nations, or even with one's society's neo-feudalistic structure due to the explosion of multimillionaires thanks to new forms of contemporary media.¹⁴ Above all, though, we once questioned ourselves what life is after the pandemic, and we hoped for a better one, one that cares for nature and the planet, with a better social consciousness that extends into practice.¹⁵ Yet we look at ourselves today surrounded by extreme weather and major conflicts from the Russian aggression in Ukraine to the decades-long skirmishes between Israel and Palestine, and even the heightened tensions resulting from China's actions to its neighboring countries.

With the state's changed relation to its citizens during the pandemic, we now recognize more fully the enormous capacity it has without the pretense of civility; the book's final chapter ends with a paradox of being happy in a neo-collective state, from the premise that the state is each citizen's main debtor. Sloterdijk responds, "I can reassure you that illiberal principles are rejected at the entrance of the Philosopher's cave. Whether the society outside remains immune still remains to be seen."¹⁶ How liberality and its opposite may manifest themselves in civil society remains a pernicious feature of any democracy. Although one may remain safe in theorizing or conceptualizing from the vantage of isolation, it remains an open question of what the future of democracy or even of society may be, of the willingness of we, the sovereign people, to take collective action for more positive ideals, when we can easily fall prey to authoritarian measures and in fact desire them.

¹¹ See Sloterdijk, "Statt eines Nachworts. Leben in der Philosophenhöhle," in *Ibid.*

¹² See Sloterdijk, "Leben wir über unsere Verhältnisse?," in *Ibid.*

¹³ See Sloterdijk, "Der Staat zeigt seine eiseme Faust," in *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Sloterdijk, "Leben ohne Ausreden," in *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Sloterdijk, "Der Mensch, das Distanzwesen," in *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Sloterdijk, "Statt eines Nachworts. Leben in der Philosophenhöhle," in *Ibid.*

Despite the insightful points raised in the book, one is drawn to juxtapose the German or European political landscape, which Sloterdijk criticizes, and that of the Philippines. One must constantly bear in mind how the intended audience was primarily the German (and French) public. Anyone who has travelled abroad would have been confronted by the stark difference of the pandemic's treatment elsewhere; the use of facemasks during flights or in crowded public places like the huge airports of Dubai or Singapore could provide an initial indication of the traveler's country of origin—those wearing masks recognized to have flown from parts of Asia or some other developing region. We may have faced the pandemic's wave as a whole global community, however, contrary to the title of a still untranslated book of his, *Im selben Boot* (In the Same Boat),¹⁷ we are *not* in the same boat. Akin to this point, I return to the title of the current book under review and raise the question, what if the state never wore or has long taken off its velvet gloves? This is a question not for Sloterdijk, who was referring to his own cultural and political experiences, but for thinkers receptive to his ideas who have a different social and intellectual landscape to contend with. It is an ignominy that certain scholars flirt with the iron fists of the ungloved state and, with the voice of the academia not as prized in the country, the possibility of illiberality being welcomed in the Philosopher's cave.

What is exceptional in this collection of Sloterdijk's essays is the interplay of the wide array of concepts across chapters – such as immunity, co-immunism, donation/gift, cynicality, the World Interior – that he establishes in other books. Despite being short paragraphs, his responses seem to deepen one's understanding not simply of his conservative views of the pandemic or of certain themes he touches, but also of oneself and the capacity to now disagree with his insights that, during their conception, seemed to provide to the reader a beacon of hope of life after the pandemic. Likewise, the arrangement of the essays allow for a somewhat sustained reading since the last theme of each chapter makes its return in the following. Finally, the interview approach allows a lighter reading compared to his denser, essay-type books. Those who appreciate this would likewise find the following works to be insightful: *Selected Exaggerations* (2013; trans. 2015), *Neither Sun nor Death* (2006; trans. 2006), *Selbstversuch – Ein Gespräch mit Carlos Oliveira* (1996), or even the untranslated three volumes of his *Zeilen und Tage* (2012, 2018, 2023).¹⁸ On a final note, I wish to mention that Sloterdijk prefaced

¹⁷ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Im selben Boot. Versuch über die Hyperpolitik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993).

¹⁸ Peter Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations – Conversations and Interviews 1993–2012*, ed. by Bernhard Klein, trans. by Karen Margolis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, *Neither Sun nor Death*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), *Selbstversuch – Ein Gespräch mit Carlos Oliveira* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1996), *Zeilen und*

this work with a precaution that these statements were made with a great lack of binding knowledge that perhaps we have access to today.¹⁹ However, this lack of knowledge is earnestly not something characteristic to the statements made in the book but rather to ourselves, a lack of binding knowledge of who we are, of our reality, and why we must change ourselves (*und warum wir uns ändern müssen*).

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¹⁹ See Sloterdijk, *Der Staat streifte seine Samthandschuhe ab*, Vorbemerkungen.

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