

KRITIKE

An Online Journal of Philosophy

VOL.19, NO. 1

ISSN 1908-7330



K R I T I K E

An Online Journal of Philosophy

Volume 19, Number 1

March 2025

ISSN 1908-7330



KRITIKE is a member of the Asian Journals Network and is supported by the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Letters, and the Office of the Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation, University of Santo Tomas

COPYRIGHTS



All materials published by KRITIKE are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

KRITIKE supports the Open Access Movement. While an article published by Kritike is under the CC BY-NC-ND license, users are allowed to download and use the article for non-commercial use (e.g., research or educational purposes). Users are allowed to reproduce the materials in whole but are not allowed to change their contents. The copyright of an article published by the journal remains with its author; users are required to acknowledge the original authorship. The author of an article has the right to republish his/her work (in whole, in part, or in modified form) upon the condition that Kritike is acknowledged as the original publisher.

KRITIKE and the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas do not necessarily endorse the views expressed in the articles published.

© 2007-2025 KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy | ISSN 1908-7330 | OCLC 502390973 | kritike.editor@gmail.com

ABOUT THE COVER

“Soledad”

The cover photo features the *Postigo de Nuestra Señora de Soledad*, located at north of Intramuros. It was taken from the outside of the Walled City, on the newest phase of the Pasig River Esplanade that recently opened. This vista peers into Fort Santiago, and one could image how heavily guarded this would have been then, an unauthorized individual utterly lucky to even set foot on what was perhaps then a wharf patrolled by the army.

As a *postigo* (postern), this passage was used for emergency escapes, such as that of *Gobernador General* Simón de Anda y Salazar in the Battle of Manila as part of the Seven Years’ War (24 September 1762 – 6 October 1762). The once coveted passage of this *postigo* and its adjacent mighty wharf of yesterday are today barely tourist attractions, at the very farthest end of the esplanade. And perhaps it is providential that this portal is named after the Blessed Virgin of Solitude, *Nuestra Señora de Soledad*. Just like the Blessed Virgin, this gate is a silent witness to the horrors of the Walled City; like her alone after the death of her Son, this gate is too left in solitude, today alone as the surrounding districts have embraced the globalized world.



KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy
19:1 (March 2025)

Photograph by Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, 2025
Layout and caption by Kritike Editorial Board

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.

KRITIKE supports the **Open Access Movement** and is classified under the "**Platinum OA**" category, which means that articles published by the journal are fully accessible online without a subscription fee. Moreover, the journal does not levy charges against the authors for the publication of their works. Articles can either be read on site or downloaded as pdf files and old issues are archived for future retrieval.

KRITIKE is committed to meet the highest ethical standards in research and academic publication. The journal is guided by the principles set in its **Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement**.

KRITIKE is a member of the **Asian Journals Network** and is a **Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Journal Incentive Program Recognized Journal (Journal Challenge Category)**. The journal is indexed and listed in the following: The Philosopher's Index, Web of Science™ Core Collection (Clarivate Analytics), Scopus® (Elsevier), Humanities International Complete™ (EBSCO), Humanities International Index™ (EBSCO), ASEAN Citation Index, International Directory of Philosophy, Modern Language Association (MLA) Directory of Periodicals, Directory of Open Access Journals, PhilPapers: Philosophical Research Online, and Google Scholar.

KRITIKE is a biannual journal. Regular issues are published in March and September; occasional special issues are published between October and February.

Editorial Board

Editors-in-Chief

Paolo A. Bolaños, *University of Santo Tomas*
Roland Theuas DS. Pada, *University of Santo Tomas*

Managing Editors

Gian Carla D. Agbisit, *University of Santo Tomas*
Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland, *University of Santo Tomas*
Raniel SM. Reyes, *University of Santo Tomas*

Associate Editors

Fleurdeliz R. Altez-Albela, *University of Santo Tomas*
Moses Aaron T. Angeles, *San Beda College*
Brian Lightbody, *Brock University*
Melanie P. Mejia, *University of Santo Tomas*
Dean Edward A. Mejos, *University of Asia & the Pacific*
Mario Wenning, *Universidad Loyola Andalusia, Seville*

Editorial Collaborative

Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *Ateneo de Manila University*
Napoleon Mabaquiao, *De La Salle University*
Jeffrey Oca, *Eastern Visayas State University*
Renante Pilapil, *Ateneo de Davao University*

Style and Copy Editor

Julia Carmela D. De Castro, *University of Santo Tomas*
Paula Nicole C. Eugenio, *University of Santo Tomas*

Communications Officer

Bryan Patrick B. Garcia, *University of Santo Tomas*

International Advisory Board

†Romualdo E. Abulad, *University of Santo Tomas*
Karin Bauer, *McGill University*
Bob Brecher, *University of Brighton*
Roger Burggraeve, *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*
Alfredo P. Co, *University of Santo Tomas*
William Franke, *Vanderbilt University*
Leovino Ma. Garcia, *Ateneo de Manila University*
Heinrich Geiger, *Katholischer Akademischer Ausländer-Dienst*
Morny M. Joy, *University of Calgary*
John F. X. Knasas, *University of St. Thomas – Houston*
Megan Jane Lavery, *Columbia University*
Zosimo E. Lee, *University of the Philippines - Diliman*
Julius D. Mendoza, *University of the Philippines - Baguio*
Hans-Georg Moeller, *University of Macau*
Paul Patton, *Wuhan University*
Karl-Heinz Pohl, *Universität Trier*
Peter L P Simpson, *City University of New York*
Nicholas H. Smith, *Macquarie University*
John Rundell, *University of Melbourne*
†Vincent Shen, *University of Toronto*
John Weckert, *Charles Sturt University*

K R I T I K E

An Online Journal of Philosophy

Volume 19, Number 1

March 2025

FEATURED ARTICLE

1 JOVE JIM S. AGUAS

Martin Buber's Philosophical Anthropology and Philosophy of Dialogue (Part II of II)

ARTICLES

25 NAHUM BROWN

Ethics and AI Classification: Power, Bias, and the Technical Worldview

50 CATHLYNE JOY P. ALVAREZ-ABAREJO

On Virtue Epistemology and Artificial Intelligence in Education:
Could AI be the 21st Century Transformation Machine of Nozick?

75 SOUMICK DE

Comic Intelligence and Its Anarchic Origins in Modernity

100 ANTHONY LAWRENCE A. BORJA

Democratizing Machiavelli? A Critique

129 DARYL Y. MENDOZA

Revisiting Giorgio Agamben's Reformulation of Michel Foucault's Biopolitics

153 VIDYA M. GEORGE AND KOSHY THARAKAN

Home as Heterotopia: Describing the *unheimlich*
through a Foucauldian Heterotopology of Home

171 JOVITO V. CARIÑO

The Courage to Think: What the Legacy of St. Catherine of Alexandria Means Today

193 IAN RAYMOND B. PACQUING

Why Radical Change is Elusive: Rethinking Social Transformation

BOOK REVIEWS

212 PAULA NICOLE C. EUGENIO

Wallace, Cynthia R., *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion*

217 JOVITO V. CARIÑO

Wiitala, Michael (Ed.), *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*

226 JOSHUA CEDRIC A. GUNDAYAO

Shelby, Katherine Wrisley, *Spiraling into God: Bonaventure on Grace, Hierarchy, and Holiness*

232 ANTON HEINRICH L. RENNESLAND

Giles, James, *The Way of Awareness in Daoist Philosophy*

Featured Article

Martin Buber's Philosophical Anthropology and Philosophy of Dialogue (Part II of II)

Jove Jim S. Aguas

Abstract: In contemporary philosophy, philosophical anthropology focuses more on the human person and the value of a concrete individual subject. Amid consumerism, materialism, and technological advancement, more philosophers focus on the dignity and value of the human person. By studying the human person, what he is, his concerns, intentions, and relationships with the world, God, and others, we can fully understand his essence as a concrete individual and relational subject. One of those thinkers who focused on the human person as a relational subject is the Jewish religious existentialist philosopher, Martin Buber. This paper highlights Buber's philosophical anthropology and philosophy of dialogue, based on an existential and relational or intersubjective character of human existence, man's relation with God as the eternal Thou, the distinction between the two fundamental types of human relations (*I-It* and *I-Thou*), and the realm of the "between." The main focus of this paper thus are Buber's notions of man as a relational subject and thou, intersubjectivity that is anchored on his notion of dialogue, the distinction between the two types of relations and their primal movements, genuine dialogue, the interhuman and its elements, and also social relations.

Keywords: Buber, genuine dialogue and I-Thou relation, intersubjectivity, we-relation

Martin Buber's Notion of Intersubjectivity

In this part, we focus more on Buber's view of intersubjectivity, or intersubjective relations expressed in his famous distinction between the two primary words, *I-It* and *I-Thou*, his notion of the life of dialogue, the primal movements of relation, and the interhuman and genuine dialogue. In

2 MARTIN BUBER

the preface to *Daniel*,¹ we find Buber's first articulation of the dialogical relations through a personal experience. As Buber descended a mountain with a stick in his hand, and, wanting to rest, he pressed the stick against a tree trunk, he felt a contact with the stick at two points simultaneously, "here, where I held the stick, and there, where it touched the bark. Appearing to be only where I was, I nonetheless found myself there, too, where I found the tree. At that time, dialogue appeared to me."² He wondered how it could have been that he had experienced contact with the stick simultaneously in two places. He realized that dialogue is a kind of synthesis of *I* and *Thou*, a very special kind of synthesis where the *I* does not become a *Thou*. The duality of the self and the other remains even though it develops into a unity that includes the duality.³

We can see here that his notion of dialogue is grounded in his personal experiences. It is also based on his Jewish roots, particularly Hasidism. Hasidism is the popular mystical movement of Jews in Eastern Europe. It is opposed to traditional Rabbinism, which focuses on strict observance of the letter of the law.⁴ It was a burst of spontaneous and creative religious enthusiasm in a popular revivalist movement that flamed through the villages and ghettos of Eastern Europe.⁵ It was a popular communal mysticism that embraced half of the Jewry in that part of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, a kind of "revolt of the masses against rabbinic legalism and scholasticism."⁶ He first encountered Hasidism in his childhood days. Buber recalls that every summer, his father, Carl Buber, would take him from their estate in Bukovina to a nearby village of Sadagora, the seat of the dynasty of the Zaddikim.⁷ However, it was his grandfather, Solomon Buber, a Hebrew scholar, who taught him the religious wisdom of this doctrine. As

¹ *Daniel* was published in 1913 and was a precursor to Buber's philosophy of dialogue which was fully developed in the *I and Thou*, published in 1923. Early in his life, Buber was influenced by Hasidism—the popular mystical movement of East European Jewry. *Daniel* signaled a crisis in Buber's life, the transition from mystical to his dialogical period. In his youth, he was influenced by different forms of mysticism and did research on Indian, Chinese, and German mysticism before he studied Hasidism. See Samuel Hugo Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy: From Kierkegaard to Buber*, trans. by Arnold A. Gerstein (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 217.

² Martin Buber, *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 47.

³ Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy*, 218.

⁴ See Maurice Friedman, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: The Life of Martin Buber* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 37–38.

⁵ Will Herberg, *The Writings of Martin Buber* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 11–13.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Martin Buber, *Meetings* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1973), 38. Zaddikim came from the term "zaddik," meaning a righteous or justified man, a completed man.

a child, Buber recalled, "I had received an image of the Zaddik and through the sullied reality had glimpsed the pure idea, the idea of the genuine leader of a genuine community."⁸

Hasidism is founded on real community, and the figurehead of the community is the *rebbe* or *zaddik*, the righteous or justified man. Buber studied its texts and teachings, and it gave him a "unique personal direction from which, even in the most terrible crises, he was never deflected."⁹ Buber's discovery of Hasidism brought with him the idea of a meaningful encounter, a meaningful relation both with man and with God. Hasidism appealed to him because of its emphasis on love, meeting, relation with God and fellow human, prayer, and true self. It is through Hasidism that he encountered a community based on brotherly love and interpersonal relations among its members. Here, he found the notion of a complete man and the link between uniqueness and dialogue. While we say that Buber's dialogical philosophy is based on his philosophical anthropology, such philosophy is solidly based on Hasidism's notions of love, meeting, and interpersonal relations with God and fellow human. Influenced by this tradition, Buber goes on to teach a life of relation, a life of dialogue.

The Life of Dialogue

In the earlier version of dialogue, which he articulated in *Daniel*, Buber introduced two ways of relating to the environment and others. The first way is through dialogue; if it is true dialogue, it means the commitment of one to another and implies openness and honesty. The other is social chatter and external relationships, where we use one another as a means to ends. Thus, there are two ways in which a person relates to his surroundings, other people, and things. Buber calls these two kinds of relationships *realization* and *orientation*.¹⁰

In orientation, we can observe how a man wants to find his way in a strange city. He constructs a mental plan of the city, linking one house to another even though the single house does not interest him, but at least it links one house to another or to a section of the streets in the plan of the city. For a man with such an orientation, individual things do not matter; what is of interest to him is the context of the collective. According to Buber, this is the way that science and technology relate to things, and all of us in our everyday lives relate to things in the same way. In various ways, what generally interests us is the context and usefulness of things and other people.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹ Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: Life and Works* (Great Britain: Search Press, 1982), 98.

¹⁰ See Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy*, 219.

4 MARTIN BUBER

So, the individual thing or individual person is always a springboard or transition to something else.¹¹

Buber illustrates this further with the example of a Swiss pine. The Swiss pine is in front of me, and I can relate to it by orienting myself to it. I then see the tree through its relation to the surrounding world. As a botanist, I can classify it and compare it to other plants. I can weigh the utility of the tree in comparison to others. But I do not know anything about the tree in these ways. If, however, I open myself to the tree with all my energy directed toward it, if I assimilate it, as it were, and commit myself to it, then I am transformed, and I become the tree itself. This is like the example of the stick: I experience a particular tree. I can identify myself with it without surrendering my unique position. I succeed, in other words, in conjoining the two: myself and the tree. In this way, I gain access to the mystery of reality.¹² The same could be said about the mother who protects her child in her arms. This is the moment of entering the mystery of reality, a higher state of activity that I initiate, through which I open myself and transform my energy into a magical strength that fascinates and glorifies. This is the moment of *realization*, according to Buber: the great miracle of realization from which the philosophy of dialogue emerges because a true dialogue has the same openness and commitment along with the preservation of the person speaking.¹³

Buber offers three more examples of the concept of realization: the poet, the child, and the primitive. The poet uses language in a way that is different from the usual use of language. His words are bright and pregnant with meaning, and he can give new meaning to words. He elevates his language above the ordinary level of speech, and the language he uses subsequently confirms him as a poet; language acknowledges the self-realization of the poet. A small child at play is completely immersed in his game and does not feel what is taking place around him. The primitive man, too, still has in him the full strength of realization. For the child and the primitive man, the power of realization is much greater than with the person who lives in a complex civilization and is not geared to realizing experience.¹⁴ Orientation does not remove the power of experience. Buber also adds the wise man, the hero, the prophet, and especially the creative person who is totally engrossed in his creation. Also included are the anonymous people who choose solitude, become monks, or choose to live a life of radical realization in a narrow circle of people.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹² Buber, *Daniel*, 55.

¹³ See Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy*, 221.

¹⁴ Buber, *Daniel*, 71.

For Buber, realization and orientation are extremes; one must live with both as they go hand in hand or alternately. Realization demands one's entire spiritual and physical strength. If one engages only in realization, one will cease to be a person and would become a god. If one lives only by orientation, without any realization, he will annihilate himself from within. These two extremes cannot be achieved, so realization and orientation alternate continuously.¹⁵ The two complement each other, such as science and its dissemination or invention and its exploitation. The moments of maximum realization must be followed by moments of orientation in everyday life. Like the *I-It* and *I-Thou* attitudes, they swing back and forth.

In his more mature works, Buber fully developed his notion of intersubjective relation grounded in dialogue. Buber used the term dialogue to signify the life of relation. For him, the dialogic is not limited to man and fellow man; it is not only "between man and man" but also "between man and God." As discussed already, the fundamental relation of man is "triadic": the self, God, and others, and the other could be a fellow man or the world or nature. For Buber, real relationships with other human beings are possible only through a real relationship with God. The relation of man extends beyond his relationship with the infinite and divine; there is also the relationship with the finite. Hence, in dialogic meetings, man becomes and transcends himself. It is in this sense that by virtue of its dialogical character, human life touches upon absoluteness and acquires an absolute meaning that overpasses its own conditioned nature.¹⁶ Buber explains:

Human life touches on the absolute in virtue of its dialogical character, for in spite of his own uniqueness man can never find, when he plunges into the depth of his life, a being that is whole in itself and as such touches the absolute. Man can become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self.¹⁷

This other self may also be conditioned and limited as oneself, but in being together or in a relationship, the unlimited and unconditioned are experienced. Hence, the dialogic relation is the matrix of man's "finite infinity." Buber emphasizes that authentic human existence is living a "dialogic life"; although man needs a relation that is objective and

¹⁵ Bergman, *Dialogical Philosophy*, 222.

¹⁶ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 167.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

6 MARTIN BUBER

manipulative, it is living in the *I–Thou* that makes human existence authentic human existence.

Kinds of Dialogue

Buber distinguishes three kinds of dialogue. First is *technical dialogue*, which is prompted solely by the need for objective understanding. In a conference or in a meeting, even in a lecture or discussion where the goal is a common understanding of the content or subject matter, there is technical dialogue. The intention or objective is to have an unequivocal understanding and interpretation of the content of the conversation. Technical dialogue always relies on spoken or written language; it always requires that one is attentive to at least what the other is saying.

The second is *monologue* disguised as dialogue. Here, one is never aware of the other as somebody who is not himself and, simultaneously, somebody with whom he nevertheless communicates. The flow of communication is one-sided. It may appear that the other is recognized as a source of inputs or ideas, but in reality, only the self or only one of the two parties dominates the discussion.

The third one is dialogue as a *genuine human relation*. In genuine dialogue, spoken or silent, each participant really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between him and them.¹⁸ This kind of dialogue can happen even outside the confines of speech and gestures. Buber says, “For a conversation, no sound is necessary, not even a gesture.”¹⁹ He further expounds:

Human dialogue, therefore, although it has its distinctive life in sign, that is, in sound and gestures, can exist even without the sign, but admittedly not in an objectively comprehensible form. On the other hand, an element of communication, however inward, seems to belong to its essence. But in its highest moments, dialogue reaches out even beyond these boundaries. It is completed outside contents, even the most personal, which are or can be communicated.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Any conversation will always be within the bounds of spoken or written language; words will always have to be spoken, or even gestures will be part of the conversation. But for Buber, in genuine dialogue, speech is not even necessary; genuine dialogue can happen below or beyond the level of speech. We can say that it is a very personal communication. According to Buber, the life of dialogue may dispense with speech and communication, but it has as its minimum constitution one thing, that is, “mutuality of inner action.”²¹ This mutuality of inner action is the recognition of the presence of the other; that is, at the very least, I am aware of the presence of the other and that I turn toward him, and I give my attention to him, to his presence. Buber said that when two men are bound together in dialogue, they must obviously be turned to one another; therefore, they must, no matter with what measure of activity or consciousness of activity, have turned to one another.²² The fundamental gesture of recognizing the presence of the other is the basic ground of dialogue; for dialogue to happen, one must perceive this man or person confronting or standing in front of him as a fellow human being. The perception of a human person facing us is a fundamental component of dialogue.

Buber distinguishes three ways of perceiving a man who is in front of us or living before our eyes. First, is that of an observer who is wholly intent on fixing the observed man in his mind, on “noting” him. Hence, he fixes his attention on the traits, gestures, and expressions. He considers every detail, every aspect, every quality. Take, for example, a therapist, a counsellor, and even an educator who may perceive the person or the patient, client, or student if they are only concerned with the details and the traits or qualities; then they are just observers and not partners in a dialogue.

The second is that of the onlooker who is not at all attentive to the details. He takes up a position that lets him see the object freely and awaits what will be presented to him. He pays attention not to traits but to existence, to events, and affairs. The observer and onlooker have almost the same disposition: they are detached from what they observe or look at. They see these objects as separate from them. There is no involvement or attachment. They are not “touched” by the object; the other is just one of the many things they observe or look at. Buber says: “The observer and onlooker regard the man before them as an object separated from themselves and their personal life.”²³

Buber simply calls the third way “becoming aware.” He says:

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

8 MARTIN BUBER

There is also the moment when a man meets me about whom there is something I cannot grasp in any objective way at all that “says something” to me.... It means he says something to me, addresses something to me, speaks something that enters my own life. He speaks something that enters my own life.²⁴

The effect of what the other says to me is totally different from that of looking on and observing. The saying is “real speech,” one that reaches my inner being. This man is not my object. This way of perceiving is “becoming aware.”²⁵ I became aware that this man is a person, a unique subject. Of course, he has his traits and details, but that is not my focus; I am just aware and pay attention to his presence. Becoming aware sets dialogue to unlimited possibilities, and the limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness.

Since dialogue is based on “saying,” genuine responsibility exists only where there is real responding,²⁶ responding to what happens to one, to what is to be seen, heard, and felt. In genuine dialogue, there is always that sense of reciprocity. Dialogue is not confined to the self; it is not egocentric; it reaches out, it responds, and it reciprocates. Dialogue is contrasted with monologue, which is always confined to the self, even in the most tender intimacy. The contrast between monologue and genuine dialogue must not be confused with the contrast between egoism and altruism. There are people who are absorbed in social activity but have never spoken from being to being with a fellow human. However, the dialogic should not be identified with love. But love without the dialogic, without real outgoing to the other, reaching to the other and companying with the other, the love remaining with itself, this is called Lucifer.²⁷

According to Buber, the basic movement of dialogue is turning to the other.²⁸ If one looks at someone and addresses him, he turns to him, of course, with the body, but also with the requisite measure with the soul, in that one directs his attention to him. On the contrary, the basic movement of monologue is not turning away as opposed to turning towards, but “reflexion.” Buber clarifies that reflexion is different from egoism or egotism; it is not that man is concerned with himself, considers, enjoys, idolizes himself; it is rather when a man withdraws from accepting with his essential

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁷ Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

²⁸ Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22.

being another person in his particularity. He lets the other exist only as his own experience and as a “part of myself.” Here, dialogue becomes fiction.²⁹

I-It and I-Thou Relations

Buber is well-known for the distinction that he made between two fundamental types of relation, which he expressed in the famous primary words, *I-It* and *I-Thou*. These fundamental types of relations are based on what he regarded as the primary attitudes of man. These primary words are not to be taken as separate words but as combined words. In the first lines of his famous book, *I and Thou*, he writes:

To man, the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks. The primary words are not isolated words but combined words. The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*, and the other primary word is the combination *I-It*, wherein without a change in the primary word, one of the words, *He* or *She*, can replace *It*. Hence, the *I* of man is also twofold. For the *I* of the primary word, *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word, *I-It*.³⁰

Buber stresses that these primary words do not signify things but relations. The *I-It* and *I-Thou* are the basic relations that we can enter into. The *I* of man comes into being in the act of speaking one or the other of these primary words. The real determinant of the primary word in which a man takes his stand is not the object or the subject over against him, but the way he relates himself to the object or the subject, that is, the kind of relation which he establishes towards the other.

Buber writes, “The primary word *I-Thou* can only be spoken with the whole being. The other primary word can never be spoken with the whole being.”³¹ In the *I-Thou* relation, man enters with his whole being and takes his stand in it. He enters into that relationship as a totally genuine person; he does not have any guise or pretension about the relationship; he does not have any interior motive but the desire to establish a good interpersonal relationship. In the *I-It* relation, on the contrary, man does not enter with his

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

³⁰ Buber, *I and Thou*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*

10 MARTIN BUBER

whole being, not as a genuine person. He is not honest about the relationship; his purpose in that relationship is not the relationship itself; he has other motives, and interpersonal relations are only secondary to those other motives.

According to Buber, the man in the *I–Thou* relation has nothing for an object; if I enter into that relation, I do not have an object but a subject. For what is an object? It is something that one perceives, something that one is sensible of, something that one imagines, and something that one wills, feels, and thinks of. But the *I–Thou* relation is not a relation of man to object; the person in the *I–Thou* does not have an object to perceive, to imagine, to feel, or to think of; he has somebody, a fellow person, towards whom he stands in relation. These and all the others, Buber says, belong to the world of *It*.

So, when the *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has nothing; he has indeed nothing, but he takes his stand in relation. The *Thou* establishes the world of relation, while the *It* sets the world as the world of experience. In the *I–Thou*, the relation is direct and mutual; no foreknowledge, system of ideas, or fancy intervenes between the *I* and the *Thou*. In this relation, there is no aim, no anticipation or lust. The *I–Thou* establishes the world of mutual relation; the *I* and *Thou* mutually affect each other. Buber writes, “my *Thou* affects me as *I* affect my *Thou*.”³² Between the *I* and *Thou*, there is mutual giving, there is mutual sharing of selves; I give myself to my *Thou*, and he, in turn, gives himself to me; I lend my ears to him in attention, and he likewise lends his ears to him in attention, and he likewise lends his ears to me. My *Thou* may not give me something material, something that will sustain me in life, but he teaches me how to meet and relate with others, and he helps me see other life.

The *Thou* appears in space, that is, in the exclusive situation of what is over against it, where everything can be only the background out of which it emerges and not in space as its boundary and measured limit. In fact, when I meet a *Thou*, I do not focus so much on the physical surroundings but on the *Thou* itself. It also appears in time, that is, in that of the event which is fulfilled in itself; “it is not lived as part of a continuous and organized sequence, but is lived in a ‘duration’ whose purely intensive dimension is definable only in terms of itself.”³³ When I meet a *Thou*, the meeting is not measured in terms of chronological events but as “duration”; I am not mindful of the time that elapsed because I am focusing on his presence. Buber contends that the world of the *Thou* appears simultaneously as acting and as being acted upon and not linked to a chain of causes: “Only the world of *It* can be arranged in order:

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

only things can be co-ordinated in time and space, but the *Thou* knows no system of coordination.”³⁴

Buber clarifies that in the world of the *Thou*, when man meets what exists and becomes simply a single being, and each thing is simply a being, every happening affects him. “Measure and comparison disappear in this world; each meeting is not organized to make the world, but each is a sign of world-order. This world has no density; it is not reliable, and you cannot hold on to it. If man makes it as his object, then it vanishes.”³⁵ The moment I focus on the physical surroundings and the time that elapsed during our encounter instead of on his presence, the *Thou* turns into an *It*. According to Buber, “The world of *It* is set in the context of time and space. The world of *Thou* is not set in the context of either of these.”³⁶

The world of the *Thou* may not offer me anything material; it may not give me something that will sustain me in this early life, for, unlike the *It*, it does not teach me how to use and manipulate others; on the contrary, it teaches me how to meet and relate with others; it certainly helps me see the other life. Buber writes:

Between you and it, there is mutual giving: you say *Thou* to it and give yourself to it, and it says *Thou* to you and gives itself to you. You cannot make yourself understood with others concerning it, you are alone with it. But it teaches you to meet others and to hold your ground when you meet them. Through the graciousness of its comings and the solemn sadness of its goings, it leads you away to the *Thou* in which the parallel lines of relations meet. It does not help to sustain you in life; it only helps you glimpse eternity.³⁷

The *I-Thou* signifies a relation which is person to person, subject to subject. It is a relationship where there is acceptance, sincerity, concern, dialogue, and care. It is characterized by mutuality, directness, presentness, and intensity.

The *I-It*, on the contrary, is the primary word of experiencing and using; it is entirely lacking in directness and mutuality; whether in feeling or in knowing or in acting, it is the typical subject-object relationship; it is always mediate and indirect, dealing with others only in terms of categories

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

12 MARTIN BUBER

and qualities. The *I-It* is significant only in connection and differentiation but not in real relation. The *I-It* signifies a relation that is person to thing and subject to object. It involves some forms of utilization, manipulation, control, and domination. People in this world are not treated as persons but as objects, things, tools, and instruments. In life, the man who takes advantage of his neighbor, his employee, or his acquaintance reduces the other person to a mere object.

However, a change may happen in these relations. What at one moment is the *Thou* of the *I-Thou* may become an *It* of an *I-It*, and what at one moment the *It* of *I-It* may become the *Thou* of an *I-Thou*. As long as the relation remains to be person to person, the other remains to be a *Thou*, but when the relation shifts to a person to a thing, then the other is reduced to an *It*. Buber writes:

Indeed, to man, the world is twofold based on his twofold attitude. His first attitude is to perceive what exists around him as simply as things, beings as things, and what happens around him simply as events: things consisting of qualities, events of moments, things entered in the graph of place, and events in that of time. To man, this world is an ordered, detached, and reliable world, having density and duration; it is organized and is always there next to him. It is his object and will remain to be as long as he wishes it to be. He can take it, and it lets itself be taken, but then, it does not give itself to him. He can hold on to it for life, and it will sustain him, but then, he cannot meet others in it.³⁸

Buber clarifies that the *I-It* and *I-Thou*, like his earlier distinction between orientation and realization, continuously alternate, and both are essential types of relations or ways of living. Thus, he concludes: "And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without *It*, man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man."³⁹

In *I and Thou*, he discusses relations quite in a general manner, overseeing the importance of making a clearer distinction among the types of *I-Thou* relations that can be entered into and dialogue between man and man. Maurice Friedman, an authority in Buber's philosophy, writes that Buber once told him that if Buber were to write again the *I and Thou*, he would seek different categories to clarify better the distinction among the types of relation

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

I-Thou (with nature, art, animals, and God) and the dialogue between man and man.⁴⁰ In his later book, *Between Man and Man*, Buber provides a clearer description of what he calls the life of dialogue, that is, the dialogue between man and man. In *The Knowledge of Man*, he provides a clear picture of the interhuman.

The Primal Movements of Relation

Buber's philosophy of dialogue is not just a phenomenological description of types of dialogue based on the twofold attitude of *I-It* and *I-Thou*. It also entails an ontology, which identifies the "between" as the real, that is, as the real ground of human existence. But to understand this ontological basis, we need to discover the two basic movements of man from which the principle of human life is derived. But first, what is this principle of life? Buber starts with what nature offers us, which is that we are part of nature, and that man belongs to the association of living beings. However, Buber does not proceed by noting the characteristics that distinguish us from the rest of nature; instead, he examines the ground of being of those characteristics as a whole. By proceeding in such a manner, Buber discovers that such characteristics constitute not only special types of being but a special way of being. Buber then arrives at what he calls the twofold movement of the principle of human life.⁴¹ He calls the first movement the "primal setting at a distance" and the second "entering into relation."⁴² Man is different from all other living beings because "man stands over against a world from which he has been set at a distance and unlike all other living beings can, again and again, enter into a relationship with it."⁴³

According to Buber, the first movement is the presupposition of the second because we can only enter into relation with a being that is set at a distance, that is, both of us are independent opposites. This double movement cannot be demonstrated by looking at man's inner life but through the phenomenon of his "connection with an otherness which is constituted as otherness by the event of distancing."⁴⁴ But through this phenomenon we can have a clear view of the inner life of man.

Science, modern biology in particular, speaks of an environment like that of animals as a "world." But the notion of "world" only applies to man.

⁴⁰ Maurice Friedman, "Introductory Essay," in *Knowledge of Man* by Martin Buber (New York: Harper & Row Publishing, 1965), 27.

⁴¹ See Martin Buber, *Knowledge of Man* (New York: Harper & Row Publishing, 1965), 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Martin Buber, *The Way of Response*, ed. by N.N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 104.

⁴⁴ Buber, *Knowledge of Man*, 60.

14 MARTIN BUBER

It is only man who can replace the unstable conglomeration of various objects by a unity that can be imagined and thought by him as existing for himself. With man and with his human life, a world exists. But a world is only conceivable by an act of setting at a distance. Buber explains, "Only when a structure of being is independently over against a living being, an independent opposite, does a world exist."⁴⁵ Indeed, "only through this act of setting at a distance does man have a 'world'—an unbroken continuum which includes not merely all that he and other men know and experience, but all that is knowable now on in the future."⁴⁶

Now, when a world exists, there is also the man who conditions it, and man is there not as a species of living creatures but as a being who has moved into reality. But man does not only exist and condition the world; he enters a relationship with it. Buber describes the act of entering into a relation with the world as "synthesizing apperception," that is, the apperception of a being as a whole and as a unity.⁴⁷ The conception of wholeness and unity in its original sense is identical to the world to which man turns. Buber further elucidates:

He who turns to the realm which he has removed from himself, and which has been completed and transformed into a world – he who turns to the world and looking upon it steps into relation with it, becomes aware of wholeness and unity in such a way that from then on he is able to grasp being as a wholeness and a unity; the single being has received the character of wholeness and unity perceived in the world.⁴⁸

However, man does not attain this view by just "setting at a distance" because this will only offer the world as an object, which is nothing but an aggregate of qualities that can be added at will; in other words, he attains not a genuine wholeness and unity. Only the view of the world in its full presence that man has set for himself, the world that is present in his whole person; only the view of the world as related to himself will offer him a world truly whole and one.

While entering into relation means entering into an *I-Thou* relation, it does not mean that setting at a distance is an *I-It* relation. When man fails to enter into an *I-Thou* relation, the distance widens and solidifies; hence,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁶ Friedman, "Introductory Essay," 21.

⁴⁷ Buber, *Knowledge of Man*, 62.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

instead of making the *I-Thou* relation possible, it obstructs it. It is not the *I-It* that sets the distance, but it is the failure to enter into an *I-Thou* relation that widens the distance, and this failure corresponds to the *I-It*. Distance is a presupposition to both *I-It* and *I-Thou*. But entering into relation is an act of the whole being; hence, it can only be possible through the *I-Thou* relation. Through this act, we constitute ourselves as human, and it must be repeated over and over again in new situations. Distance and the failure to enter into relations are not acts but states of being. Distance is an ontological state but pre-personal. It is set in man as man and precedes both the *I-It* and *I-Thou*. Through distance, man is able to have the twofold attitude of *I-It* and *I-Thou*, the basis of the two types of relations of man. It is through the *I-Thou* relation that provides the basis for personal existence. So, while distance sets man as man, it is by entering into an *I-Thou* relation that he attains personal existence; the *I-It* relation constitutes his objective and individual existence.

The *I-Thou* relation changes nothing in the primal state of things because, in the primal state, everything through distance is the independent opposite. However, the widening of distance into *I-It* because of the failure to enter into an *I-Thou* relation changes the whole situation of the other being because it is reduced to an object. This change in the situation applies not only to humans; it also applies to other beings or objects in the natural world. By looking at and observing a particular object, we make it a part of the objective world. These attitudes are attitudes of the *I-It* relation.

In the actual development of a particular person, beginning at the earliest part of his life, that is, when he is still in the womb of his mother, the *I-Thou* precedes the *I-It*, and the entering into relation is prior to any widening of the distance. Buber explains in the first part of the *I and Thou* that while the baby is, in fact, separated or different from the mother, by entering into relation with its mother completes this distance and only later on when he ceases to enter into a relation with her that the *I-It* takes shape, and the distance becomes elaborate. As the consciousness of one's identity and separateness grows, so does the difficulty of overcoming the distance and renewing the *I-Thou* relation.

Genuine Dialogue and the Interhuman

In *The Knowledge of Man*, Buber further articulates his philosophy of dialogue and conceives of the notion of the "interhuman." He notes that it is usual to always ascribe to the social realm whatever happens and takes place between man and man without really understanding the other important area in our life: the interhuman. He himself acknowledged falling into the same error and, from then on, realized the necessity of drawing a line between the two essentially different areas of our human life. So, aside from the social, we

must have a separate category of our existence, and that is the realm of the interhuman.⁴⁹ We may speak of a social phenomenon wherever the lives of a number of men live with one another, bound up together, bringing in its course shared experiences and reactions.⁵⁰ However, according to Buber, to live together and be bound up only means that each individual existence is contained and enclosed in a group existence. In a group, it does not mean that there exists a personal relation among the members. One can join any group, association, or organization without being personally related to any of the members. Yes, belongingness may be felt, but it does not presuppose personal relation. The realm of the interhuman goes beyond living and sharing experiences together. It goes beyond belonging to a particular group. In the interhuman, there is a personal relation that exists among the members of the group, not only sympathy.

The essential thing in the interhuman is that each of us regards each other as a person, unique in our own way, as partners in every event of our life. The only thing that matters is that for each of the two men, the other happens as a particular and is thus related to him in such a way that he does not regard and use him as his object but as his partner in every living event.⁵¹

In the sphere or realm of the interhuman, the participation of both partners is indispensable, that is, that the partners confront each other. There must not be any form of utilization, objectification, and control, for if such acts creep into the relation, such relation ceases to be an *I-Thou* and becomes *I-It*. Buber regards the life of dialogue as the mutual sharing of our inner selves in the realm of the interhuman. He distinguishes it from technical dialogue, which is prompted solely by the need for objective understanding, and monologue, which disguises itself as dialogue.⁵² Genuine dialogue has the sole intention of establishing a living mutual relationship between or among the participants. Buber stresses:

There is genuine dialogue—no matter whether spoken or silent—where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between him and them.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵² Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 19.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

However, before we can establish a life of dialogue, we must first have a kind of perception, which Buber calls “becoming aware.” As discussed previously, Buber distinguishes three ways we perceive the man living before our eyes. The first is that of an observer who is wholly intent on fixing the observed in his mind and in “noting him.” The observer is focused on the traits and qualities of the man before him. The second, the onlooker, is not at all intent. He just lets the object or the man present himself to him; he just sees the object freely. The onlooker and the observer both see this man before them as an object separated from themselves and their personal lives.⁵⁴ The third one is when I perceive a man, not in an objective way, but I understand that he is addressing and saying something to me. This man who “says” something to me is not my object; I perceive him not as a thing but as a man as a person, and I am concerned about him. This is what Buber regards as “becoming aware.”

Genuine dialogue is possible when two are mutually aware of each other as persons and both avoid objectification. We must always be aware of that man confronting us as a person, not as an object, because “the limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of our awareness.”⁵⁵ Buber, however, admits that it is common for a man to be the object of observation on the one hand and to be an observer on the other hand. But because we are human beings, we are able to impose limits on our objectification. Only as a partner can a man be perceived as an existing wholeness. The basic movement of the life of dialogue is the turning towards the other, which Buber distinguished from the basic movement of the life of monologue, which is the turning away from the other. This turning towards the other implies that we physically turn towards the other and focus our attention on him. Buber writes, “If you look at someone and address him, you turn to him, of course, with the body, but also in the requisite measure of the soul, in that you direct your attention to him.”⁵⁶

Elements of the Interhuman

Genuine dialogue, that is, the sharing of inner selves in the interhuman, can only unfold through the so-called elements of the interhuman and by avoiding the essential problems of dialogue. Buber enumerates three: being, personal making present, and unfolding.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

Being and Seeming

According to Buber, the essential problem of the sphere of dialogue or of the “between” is the duality of being and seeming. He distinguishes two types of existence: “The one proceeds from what one really is, the other from what one wishes to seem.”⁵⁷ He points out that some people are too concerned about their appearance and the impression that they make upon others, so they produce looks and appearances and masks to conceal their real selves. They tend to pretend that they are a certain person, but in reality, they are not; they tend to project the image that they want or wish to impress upon their audience and not their true selves. For Buber, these people live in a world of seeming. However, there are also people who are entirely independent of the impression that they make upon others. They do not pretend; they do not wear false appearances and impressions or masks; they just present to their audience or partners their real selves, the ones they really are; they are honest and sincere about themselves. In a word, they live in the light of truth. Buber differentiates how these two kinds of people deal and relate with others. Certainly, the one who lives in the world of being or the light of truth deals with the other in a spontaneous way, without reserve, because he is honest and sincere about himself and the relation: he is not hiding anything about himself. He looks at the other just as one looks at somebody with whom he is acquainted or has personal dealings. Of course, he wants to be understood by the other, but he is not concerned by the thought of the image that he can project upon the other.

Meanwhile, the one who lives in the world of seeming is concerned about the image that his appearance produces on the other, so he makes his own look. He is worried about the image that he projects. Seeming, Buber points out, is the threat to genuine dialogue. If the dialogue between two persons is mingled with and by seeming appearances and impressions, the very existence of the relation and dialogue is threatened: these seeming appearances could ruin a harmonious and honest relationship.⁵⁸ Adherence to truth is essential to the establishment of an authentic and honest personal relationship, and truth means that we communicate to the other the one we really are and that we present to the other our real being.⁵⁹ We must not allow any seeming creep into our relationship with others. “To yield to seeming,” Buber emphasizes, “is man’s essential cowardice; to resist it is his essential courage.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Buber, *Knowledge of Man*, 76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

Personal Making Present

Another important essential for the blossoming and establishment of genuine dialogue is the affirmation of the other as a person and as a unique and distinct personality; the acceptance of the person who is before me as the bearer of his personal belief, ideas, and conviction even though I may sometimes disagree with him. It is only in this manner that I can address him as a real partner in a genuine and authentic dialogue. Buber stresses:

... each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness, I can direct what I say to him as the person he is.⁶¹

I must, at certain points, offer opposition to his beliefs and personal conviction, but what is essential, according to Buber, is that I accept this person with whom I struggle. I struggle with him as his partner; I oppose his conviction, but I affirm him as a person. This is the true meaning of confirmation, that I confirm my partner as this existing unique being even while I oppose him and his conviction. It is true, Buber notes, that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue can arise between us, but I must trust him and suppose that he is also ready to deal with me as his partner.⁶²

However, before I can confirm the person confronting me, I must be first aware of him who is over against me. And to be aware of something is to experience it as a whole without reduction or abstraction. But to define awareness of man in this general fashion and sense is to categorize him with all the other beings. Thus, as discussed before, to be aware of a man in its strict sense is to experience him as a whole person gifted by spirit, to perceive him as a dynamic center and unique person. However, this awareness is impossible if my partner remains to be the object of my contemplation and observation. For the wholeness of man can never be known by contemplation and observation. It is impossible unless I enter into a personal relationship with him, unless he becomes “personally present” to me. Making the other present means “imagining the real” to imagine quite concretely what the other person is wishing, feeling, thinking, and perceiving. Buber explains: “I prefer the name ‘imagining the real’ for in its essential being, this gift is not a

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 80.

looking at the other, but a bold swinging—demanding the most intensive stirring of one's being—into the life of the other.”⁶³

In another passage, Buber claims that to imagine the real is “to make the other as a whole and unique being, as the person that he is.”⁶⁴ But more than that, “he receives him as his partner, and that means he confirms him as this other being, so far as it is for him to confirm,” and the true turning to the other includes a confirmation or acceptance.⁶⁵ Such confirmation does not mean approval, “but matter in what I am against the other, by accepting him as a partner in genuine dialogue I have affirmed him as a person.”⁶⁶

The realm of this genuine imagining is the particular real person “who steps out to meet and confront me, whom I can attempt to make present to myself just in this way and not otherwise his wholeness, unity and uniqueness and with his dynamic center.”⁶⁷ This making present enables me to “experience the other side” of the relationship without losing anything of my own reality and to live through the common event from the standpoint of the other. Buber admits this attitude of confirmation may be unanswered, and the possible dialogue may die, but if mutuality exists, then the interhuman blossoms into a genuine dialogue.

Imposition and Unfolding

For Buber, there are two basic ways of affecting men in their views and attitudes about life: imposing oneself upon the other and helping the other recognize for himself (other) what is good and right for him.⁶⁸ In the first one, which Buber calls imposition, man tries to force and impress his opinions, ideas, and his own point of view upon the other in such a way that the latter feels that the result of his acts came out because of that influence. The second way, which Buber calls *unfolding*, is when man wishes to find in the soul of the other the disposition toward which he has recognized in himself as the right.⁶⁹ The other man has his own potentialities, and he has only to recognize and open out these potentialities. In other words, he is in the “process of becoming.” He has his own opinions, ideas, and points of view, all of which may still be potentialities, and they only need to be actualized. This actualization, this opening out, happens essentially through a meeting, through the “existential communication between someone that is

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁴ Buber, *Way of Response*, 105.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Buber, *Knowledge of Man*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

actual being and someone that is in the process of becoming.”⁷⁰ Through this meeting, one becomes the “helper of the actualizing forces.” He does not impose himself, for he believes that what is right for a person is established by that person in a single and uniquely personal way. The one who imposes, or the propagandist, does not actually trust and believe that he can attain his purpose. He does not actually expect much that his methods, say, the use of loudspeakers and ads, would really affect the other. In contrast, the one who helps with the unfolding, or the educator, is confident that the other will grow and develop, for he believes in the primal inherent power in every human being.

Hence, in genuine dialogue, man must turn to the other, his fellow man and partner in all truth; the turning must be a “\turning of the being.” Man must make the other present as a whole and unique being as the person that he is. This turning to the person includes acceptance and confirmation of the other as a person. Man must not impose himself upon the other but rather help the other unfold his potentialities and assist in the actualization process. For the blossoming of the interhuman, it is necessary that the semblance does not intervene to spoil the relation of a personal being to a personal being. It is further necessary that each one means and makes the other present in his personal being and that neither should wish to impose himself on the other.⁷¹

These elements of the interhuman are in no way exhaustive. Other elements can be added to this list to make genuine dialogue blossom further. Compassion and generosity towards the other can further enhance genuine dialogue, especially if the other is disadvantaged.

The “We:” Social Dimension of Intersubjective Relations

The other dimension of intersubjective relations is the social dimension. This is signified by the essential *We* relation. If there is the *Thou*, there is also the *We*. Buber says: “What corresponds to the essential *Thou* on the level of self-being, in relation to a host of men, I call the essential *We*.”⁷² As discussed in the preceding, the person who is merely an object to me is not a *Thou* but a *He* or *She*; in the same manner, the faceless and nameless crowd in which I am entangled is not a *We* but a *one*. Buber explains that the *We* signifies a community of several independent persons who have reached a self and self-responsibility, the community resting on the basis of this self and self-responsibility and being made possible by them.⁷³

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 175.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

22 MARTIN BUBER

The *We* can arise in every kind of group; its essential character is the relation existing among the members, regardless if it is only temporary. What is essential is the genuine communion among the members, the openness of one another, and the fact that the members set aside their differences to work for a common goal. Its structure includes the potential *Thou* relation. Buber stresses that the genuine *We* is to be recognized in its objective existence and that in whatever form it is “an essential relation between person and person, between *I* and *Thou*, is always evident as actually or potentially existing.”⁷⁴ But the moment any one of the members uses others for his own interests, this is enough to prevent the essential *We* from further growing. What is important is a concrete universal around which social cohesion is maintained in order to promote order through mutual recognition and interpersonal coordination.

The *We* relation belongs to the realm of the social; though it includes the potential *Thou*, it cannot be regarded as interhuman. Men can live with one another, bound up together, bringing in their train of shared experiences and reactions. But to live together and be bound up only means that each individual existence is contained and enclosed in a group existence; there is a feeling of belongingness, just like in an association or organization. For Buber, the *We* relation is the basis of a community or a society. A society is neither an abstract structure that organizes social existence from “above” nor a conglomerate of separately acting individuals who are brought into harmony by an omnipotent mechanism like the capitalist market designed for that task; rather, it is a community where life is lived towards one another.⁷⁵ A community exists only when individuals exist with one another through dialogue and form an essential *We* relationship. An essential *We* orientation is neither individualistic nor collectivistic in design but emerges from the sphere *between* these two poles. The *between* is the dimension of direct social contact that is always reconstituted in accordance with men’s meeting with one another.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Certain attempts to study man have reduced him to an object. In order to uplift and promote the dignity of the human person against political and social ideologies and the emerging consumerist and materialist orientations that undermine the value of the human person, a philosophical

⁷⁴ Buber, *Way of Response*, 108.

⁷⁵ John W. Murphy, *The Social Philosophy of Martin Buber: The Social World as a Human Dimension* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 48.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

anthropology or a philosophy of the human person which regards everyone, regardless of race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity, or political orientation as a human being with dignity must be promoted. In a world engulfed by falsehood, violence, hate, apathy, indifference, greed, and utter disregard for the human person, what we need is a philosophy that promotes and respects the dignity and welfare of the human person.

Buber is definitely one of those who promoted not only the study of man as a human person but one who treated man both as an individual and a social being, both as a self and an other, as an *I* and a *Thou* with the utmost respect. Buber stresses that the person should be distinguished from things, from objects, for he is a subject, a *Thou*, not an *It*. The person must enter into a living interpersonal relationship with others, and he must enter into an *I–Thou* relationship and establish a genuine dialogue with others. Buber is one of the contemporary thinkers who insist on studying man in his radical singularity and concreteness; man is a subject who enters into intersubjective relations and is constantly faced with making momentous decisions that spell the difference between authentic and inauthentic existence.

Buber is not alone; there are many others like him. Gabriel Marcel criticizes modern society for its tendency to treat human beings as mere objects to be studied, described, or manipulated. Marcel singles out applied science as one field of human interest that manifests such attitude and tendency. While applied science has made significant development, such a view, according to Marcel, has led to an impoverishment of our inner lives.⁷⁷ Like Buber, he insists on establishing authentic relationships with others. Karol Wojtyla also notes that the political and social upheavals happening in our time affect our appreciation and understanding of the human individual. He observes that our time is a time of great controversy about human beings, controversy about the very meaning of human existence, and thus about the nature and significance of human beings.⁷⁸ Like Buber, he stresses the importance of acting with others through participation. There are other philosophers whom we can aptly call philosophers of the human person because they have recognized and promoted the value and dignity of the human person. They may not agree on certain aspects of the human person, but they certainly recognize the human person as a subject focusing on the concrete subjectivity of man. They recognize that man is, first and foremost, a human subject; the human person is a being with dignity that must be respected at all times and under all circumstances.

⁷⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 184.

⁷⁸ Karol Wojtyla, "Person, Subject and Community," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. by Theresa Sandok (OSM. New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 220.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Theology, Religious Studies, and Ethics
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Bergman, Samuel Hugo, *Dialogical Philosophy: From Kierkegaard to Buber*, trans. by Arnold A. Gerstein (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).
- Buber, Martin, *Between Man and Man*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
- _____, *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).
- _____, *I and Thou*, trans. by Maurice Friedman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).
- _____, *Knowledge of Man* (New York: Harper & Row Publishing, 1965).
- _____, *Meetings* (Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1973).
- _____, *The Way of Response*, ed. by N.N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1966).
- Friedman, Maurice, "Introductory Essay" in *Knowledge of Man* by Martin Buber (New York: Harper & Row Publishing, 1965).
- _____, *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: The Life of Martin Buber* (New York: Paragon House, 1993).
- _____, *Martin Buber: Life and Works* (Great Britain: Search Press, 1982).
- Herberg, Will, *The Writings of Martin Buber* (New York: New American Library, 1974).
- Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
- Murphy, John W., *The Social Philosophy of Martin Buber: The Social World as a Human Dimension* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983).
- Wojtyla, Karol, "Person, Subject and Community," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. by Theresa Sandok (OSM. New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

Article

Ethics and AI Classification: Power, Bias, and the Technical Worldview¹

Nahum Brown

Abstract: This article offers a critical response to Kate Crawford’s discussion of AI classification. In her celebrated book *Atlas of AI* (2021), Crawford examines the ethical consequences of biases, reifications, and oversimplifications that emerge from the decision-making behind AI taxonomies. I argue that there is an ambiguity in Crawford’s work about whether she believes that the problems we face with AI are solvable or not, in other words, whether an ethics of AI classification is possible. I investigate the source of this ambiguity by outlining multiple trunks and branches of arguments for and against the claim that, however complicated a solution may be, AI classification distortions are fixable. By uncovering a total of five arguments within her classification chapter, my aim is to clarify and develop Crawford’s thesis about the encoding of power while also reflecting on why this question of an ethics is unresolved in her work.

Keywords: AI classification, AI ethics, power, the technical worldview

One of the most celebrated recent books about the rapidly emerging topic of AI ethics is Kate Crawford’s *Atlas of AI* (2021).² This book is a penetrating and widely-read interdisciplinary piece that combines sociology, philosophy, and environmental studies with a specialist’s knowledge of the technical underpinnings of machine learning. While establishing specific theses chapter by chapter, the book effectively engages with a full range of pressing AI issues. These include the physical and material costs of the everyday implementation of AI on Earth (chapter 1); the difficulties that workplaces and labor forces face (chapter 2); conflicts arising from data collection and consent (chapter 3); biases and oversimplifications that come as a consequence of classification processes (chapter 4); the affect

¹ The research for this article is partially supported by a grant from the AI Ethics from the Ground Up Project, National Research Council of Thailand.

² Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

of the human face in terms of face recognition technology (chapter 5); and AI power encoding when viewed from the vantage point of the state (chapter 6). As her title suggests, Crawford describes the book as an atlas, with the chapters performing this “cartographic approach.”³ The book is a “collection of disparate parts, with maps that vary in resolution,”⁴ giving the reader the ability to range over and zoom in on a myriad of topics.

This article takes Crawford’s cartographic approach seriously by zeroing in on one of the most compelling places in the atlas: classification. In chapter 4 of her book, Crawford analyzes serious ethical problems arising from AI classification from blatant sexist, racist, and ableist biases to the more tenacious systemic prejudices that underlie taxological divisions. Reminiscent of Foucault’s theory of power, Crawford argues that the extraction, formatting, and labeling of data are never neutral. Instead, power is encoded in these processes which leads to the oversimplification and reification of reality, often with the unintended consequences of upholding conservative religious, political, and essentialist worldviews.

My primary thesis is to argue that there is an ambiguity in Crawford’s work about whether she believes that the problems we face with AI are solvable or not, in other words, whether an ethics of AI classification⁵ is possible. This amounts to a question about whether an ethics of AI classification is possible at all, in the sense that whether there are normative claims that would help to resolve the issues of classification, or whether there is really nothing that one can do. As a means to both critically analyze this ambiguity in Crawford’s work and also to develop her project further, I outline the most plausible arguments for and against the assertion that one can do an ethics of AI classification: arguments that range from the stance that the biases produced from this process are immanently fixable to the position that it would take resolving systemic injustices to resolve classification biases; from the argument that category divisions are a form of power to the claim that AI classification requires the reification of a technical worldview. In total, I outline five arguments that Crawford either explicitly or implicitly articulates.

Crawford’s work focuses primarily on ImageNet’s massive taxonomy project as an extended example of AI classification problems. After

³ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ Crawford defines “AI classification” as a “core practice in Artificial Intelligence” (*ibid.*, 127) that contributes to training AI for the implementation of face and object recognition. Data are extracted and labelled for the purpose of developing training models, especially in the form of images under the headings of categories. These taxonomical systems are then used to “predict human identity, commonly using binary gender, essentialized racial categories, and problematic assessments of character and credit worthiness” (*ibid.*, 17).

an initial conception in 2006, Stanford professor Li Fei-Fei developed ImageNet in 2009 with the aim to “map out the entire world of objects”⁶ as a means to create a tool for training data sets. ImageNet is a “large-scale image ontology”⁷ that has led to “multiple breakthroughs in object recognition.”⁸ The ImageNet team made their goals clear in a conference in the same year:

The digital era has brought with it an enormous explosion of data. The latest estimations put a number of more than 3 billion photos on Flickr, a similar number of video clips on YouTube and an even larger number for images in the Google Image Search database. More sophisticated and robust models and algorithms can be proposed by exploiting these images, resulting in better applications for users to index, retrieve, organize, and interact with these data.⁹

ImageNet at first struggled to find a method for how to extract, format, and label so many images. After realizing that hiring undergraduate students at ten dollars an hour would take nearly a century to complete the project, Li Fei-Fei discovered Amazon Mechanical Turk. This gave her a way to organize a huge low-cost labor force, capable of classifying approximately fifty images per minute per worker.¹⁰ “Suddenly we found a tool that could scale,” Li Fei-Fei says, “that we could not possibly dream of by hiring

⁶ Dave Gershgorin, “Data That Transformed AI Research—and Possibly the World,” in *Quartz* (26 July 2017), <<https://qz.com/1034972/the-data-that-changed-the-direction-of-ai-research-and-possibly-the-world/>>.

⁷ In philosophy, “ontology” usually refers to the study or science of being, either as its own abstract branch of philosophy or as a subdivision of metaphysics, including ontologies as diverse as Plato’s theory of the forms, Hegel’s study of being in *The Science of Logic*, and Heidegger’s critical analysis of the history of the question of being in *Being and Time*. However, Li Fei-Fei uses the term differently. By “ontology,” she refers to the expansive project of cataloging and matching as many nouns as possible with images. This roughly connects to a specific philosophical interpretation of ontology as the study of object existence and recognition but departs from most continental and historical accounts of ontology. Li Fei-Fei uses the term to describe ImageNet’s initial aim of being as comprehensive as possible by providing every noun imaginable within the taxonomy. The subsequent 2019 redactions of images based on ethical objections caused limitations for these initially grand claims of doing a total “ontology” of all nouns.

⁸ Kaiyu Yang et al., “Towards Fairer Datasets: Filtering and Balancing the Distribution of the People Subtree in the ImageNet Hierarchy,” in *FAT* ’20: Proceedings of the 2020 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (2020).

⁹ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 107.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

Princeton undergrads.”¹¹ This enabled ImageNet to create thousands of categories and sort millions of images:

There were categories for apples and airplanes, scuba divers and sumo wrestlers. But there were cruel, offensive, and racist labels, too: photographs of people were classified into categories like “alcoholic,” “ape-man,” “crazy,” “hooker,” and “slant eye.” All of these terms were imported from WordNet’s lexical database and given to crowdworkers to pair with images. Over the course of a decade, ImageNet grew into a colossus of object recognition for machine learning and a powerfully important benchmark for the field.¹²

It took ten years before enough public criticism—brought on partially by the artist Trevor Paglen’s ImageNet Roulette project, which let people “upload images to see how they would be classified”¹³—caused ImageNet to significantly revise its taxonomy. ImageNet subsequently removed approximately 56% of the “Person” category (one of its nine top-level categories) thus attempting to reshape the initially problematic divisions and compartments from its taxonomy:

The creators of ImageNet published a paper... titled “Towards Fairer Datasets” that sought to “remove unsafe synsets.” They asked twelve graduate students to flag any categories that seemed unsafe because they were either “inherently offensive” (for example, containing profanity or “racial or gender slurs”) or “sensitive” (not inherently offensive but terms that “may cause offense when applied inappropriately, such as the classification of people based on sexual orientation and religion”). While this project sought to assess the offensiveness of ImageNet’s categories by asking graduate students, the authors nonetheless continue to support the automated classification of people based on photographs despite the notable problems.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 108–109.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 141. Crawford describes this project as a “multiyear research collaboration” that she did with Paglen. See Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 257.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141–142.

The ImageNet team addressed their problematic decisions about AI classification by hiring a small group of graduate students to revise the categories and images within labels that appeared to be biased or offensive.¹⁵ By responding this way, ImageNet reinforced the underlying ethical assumption that such a taxonomy can be made neutral or bias-free and that massive amounts of data can be sorted and classified in a fair and unassuming way that approximately matches the reality of this content. Crawford is critical of this response from ImageNet:

The focus on the hateful categories is not wrong, but it avoids addressing questions about the workings of the larger system. The entire taxonomy of ImageNet reveals the complexities and dangers of human classification. While terms like “microeconomist” or “basketball player” may initially seem less concerning than the use of labels like “spastic,” “unskilled person,” “mulatto,” or “redneck,” when we look at the people who are labeled in these categories, we see many assumptions and stereotypes, including race, gender, age, and ability. In the metaphysics of ImageNet, there are separate image categories for “assistant professor” and “associate professor”—as though once someone gets a promotion, her or his biometric profile would reflect the change in rank.¹⁶

Why exactly does Crawford think that ImageNet’s response is unsatisfactory? Is she claiming that the twelve graduate students hired to revise the categories did a bad job, but that by hiring a full team of experts to redesign and limit the top-level category “Person,” it is still possible to correct the biases inherent in ImageNet’s initial 2009 taxonomy of all nouns? Does she have an issue with the approaches that the authors of “Towards Fairer Datasets” propose to use to fix these biases—approaches that identify black box problems, ethically questionable data, privacy concerns, imbalanced representations of demographic groups, and algorithmic development responses?¹⁷ Or, is Crawford making the larger claim that it is difficult or even impossible for classification to accurately compartmentalize the complexity of reality?

¹⁵ See also Yang et al., “Towards Fairer Datasets,” section 4.3, 550.

¹⁶ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 142.

¹⁷ See Yang et al., “Towards Fairer Datasets,” section 2, 548–549.

While she clearly rejects ImageNet's 2019 revisions, Crawford articulates an ambiguous range of different answers to this ethical question of whether AI classification could be redesigned in a fair and unbiased way. Sometimes she appears to endorse the claim that there are real solutions, even if these solutions are hard to reach. She suggests this when she emphasizes how daunting the task of revision was for the graduate students (implying that it is nevertheless possible). She also suggests this at the end of the chapter when she discusses a "fluid dynamics" strategy to classification based on Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's seminal source text for AI classification *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*.¹⁸ But more often Crawford appears to claim that solutions are impossible to implement, either because it is impossible to make data neutral, because classification is always the encoding of power, or because there is an irretractable technical worldview that comes along with the classification process:

Images—like all forms of data—are laden with all sorts of potential meanings, irresolvable questions, and contradictions. In trying to resolve these ambiguities, ImageNet's labels compress and simplify complexity. The focus on making training sets "fairer" by deleting offensive terms fails to contend with the power dynamics of classification and precludes a more thorough assessment of the underlying logics. Even if the worst examples are fixed, the approach is still fundamentally built on an extractive relationship with data that is divorced from the people and places from whence it came. Then it is rendered through a technical worldview that seeks to fuse together a form of singular objectivity from what are complex and varied cultural materials.¹⁹

In this passage, Crawford outlines multiple theses about the nature of classification. Building from her claim that "there are no neutral categories in ImageNet,"²⁰ she says that images contain contradictory interpretive meanings, multiplicities which are, nevertheless, suppressed under the abstraction process of data collection. She also claims that when ImageNet labels these images, it oversimplifies the meaning of that which it classifies, inferring from this that everyday reality has a great, or even infinite,

¹⁸ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

complexity to it but that the process of AI classification causes a distortion in the form of reduction to simplicity. She then outlines a further thesis about the relationship between classification and power, suggesting that there is an inherent encoding of power embedded within the taxonomy creators' decisions about what categories should exist and what content should be placed within them. She then turns to the issue of extracting content from its context and background, from its communities and places, implying yet another thesis about the impossibility of cataloging things from within their context. She also mentions that there is a technical worldview that comes along with AI classification, drawing on yet another point about the reduction of quality to quantity.

Crawford sometimes even seems to hold the position that the act of classifying things is in itself inherently reductive, as when she writes: "to impose order onto an undifferentiated mass, to ascribe phenomena to a category— that is, to name a thing—is in turn a means of reifying the existence of that category."²¹ This makes it sound as if the biases and reification processes that she diagnoses in AI classification are actually more fundamental and are already present in pre-AI classification systems. However, even in statements like these, we can still recognize a form of authority that is distinctively problematic about AI classification in contrast to pre-AI classification systems. AI classification projects the mystique of objectivity that Crawford elsewhere describes as "enchanted determinism."²² In other words, it projects a false sense of security that the contingent and sometimes arbitrary divisions of AI taxonomy are objectively true. Because AI classification has the anonymous aura of being an expert authority on matters of division and labeling things, it presents a specious objectivity that is difficult for most people to resist. The main reason why AI classification produces this mystique is because the source of the decision-making is hidden behind obscure black box technical processes. The labels and categories of AI classification appear as if they were the object divisions caused by a higher power of nature or objective reality,²³ when in fact they are actually the product of teams of people and companies with political agendas and subjective interests. Technochauvinism also contributes to the mystique of AI classification objectivity. Meredith Broussard defines technochauvinism as "a kind of bias that considers computational solutions

²¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

²² Alexander Campolo and Kate Crawford, "Enchanted Determinism: Power without Responsibility in Artificial Intelligence," in *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 6 (2020), 3.

²³ Cathy O'Neil describes this as the effect of "algorithmic gods." See Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016), 14.

to be superior to all other solutions.”²⁴ Because of this false sense of objectivity, AI classification exacerbates a reductive process that already appears latently in pre-AI taxonomical systems.

The five arguments that I draw from Crawford’s work can be organized under two trunks: normative and non-normative. Proponents of the normative trunk claim that there are practical, reachable solutions and that, if we are more mindful enough, it is possible to redesign categories to accurately account for the myriad distinctions of reality. The three categories that fall under the normative trunk are (1) the argument from immanent resolution, (2) the systemic argument, and (3) the people-are-irreducible-to-things argument. In contrast, proponents of the non-normative trunk claim that it is impossible to match categories accurately with reality. This is, for one reason or another, because the act of classifying things necessarily distorts the things that it classifies. There are two arguments that fall under the non-normative trunk: (4) the power argument and (5) the technical worldview argument.²⁵

Since they have significantly different consequences and notably different implications for an ethics of AI classification, it is important that we disambiguate these five arguments in Crawford’s work. By doing so, we gain a clearer view of the AI classification normativity debate as a whole—the debate about whether and by what means an ethics is possible—and thus expose the ethical complexity behind the process of dividing and cataloging things with AI. Not all of Crawford’s arguments have the same structural implication. Some imply that there are specific strategies that we could employ to resolve biases while others imply that, no matter how much we try to mitigate them, biases are inevitable and unresolvable. The main advantage of disambiguating these five arguments is that we put ourselves in a better position to evaluate the various and sometimes conflicting implications in Crawford’s work.

The conclusion I arrive at is twofold. On the one hand, the reason for explicating the arguments is to give evidence for which position Crawford ultimately thinks is best. Although a case can be made for any of these five

²⁴ Meredith Broussard, *More than a Glitch: Confronting Race, Gender, and Ability Bias in Tech* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023), 2.

²⁵ While there is mutual exclusion between the normative and non-normative trunks, one can find an overlap within the branches of each. The point of these branch distinctions is not to establish the purity of each as categorically separate from the others but to account for the various ways to view classification divisions. I also recognize that because of the vision and subtle insights of Crawford’s work, some readers might disagree with me about how the arguments should best be cataloged, claiming either that there are more or less than five arguments or that some arguments should be presented differently to more accurately reflect Crawford’s views. This is often how it goes with interpretive readings of texts that are as rich and nuanced as Crawford’s.

arguments at different moments in her text, Crawford seems to offer the most emphatic defense of the fourth argument, i.e., from power. On the other hand, my conclusion is also that part of the value of Crawford's analysis comes down to her ability to outline the range and complexity of these five different arguments. There is at least implicit textual evidence for each argument in Crawford's book. Her apparent indecision about whether AI classification distortions are resolvable or not expresses an ambiguity that is relatable and productive in that it helps to enumerate various philosophical commitments and assumptions embedded within the nature of dividing and naming things. With this in mind, I have two types of readers: readers who are directly engaged with Crawford's work can view this paper as an explicative and critical companion piece to the fourth chapter of *Atlas of AI*. But there are also more general readers who are interested in the relationship between ethics and classification and are concerned about the dangers of abstraction, reification, and the oversimplification of reality.

Before we look at the arguments, let's establish some basic definitions. Crawford's analysis builds from Bowker and Star's definition of the terms "classification" and "classification system" in:

A classification is a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world. A "classification system" is a set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work—bureaucratic or knowledge production.²⁶

Bias is the other key term for this study.²⁷ In a recent article about the technical grammar of AI, Matteo Pasquinelli lays out a helpful set of distinctions about three types of bias: "world bias," "data bias," and "algorithmic bias." He defines "world bias" as the unjust or arbitrary treatment of underrepresented groups of people that is "already apparent in society before technological intervention."²⁸ World biases include racist, sexist, ableist, classist, and other forms of discrimination based on cultural and historical prejudice. Although this form of bias predates the recent emergence of machine learning technology, the datasets of AI further reify these already ingrained stereotypes. In contrast to world bias, the other two types of biases are directly about AI. "Data bias" refers to a form of

²⁶ Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 10.

²⁷ Crawford discusses the historical etymology and usage of the word "bias." See Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 134.

²⁸ Matteo Pasquinelli, "How a Machine Learns and Fails – A Grammar of Error for Artificial Intelligence," in *Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures*, 5 (2019), 9.

discrimination that comes directly from the “capturing, formatting, and labelling of data from the training dataset.”²⁹ Pasquinelli points to data labelling as that part of the dataset training process that is most susceptible to this type of bias: “Universities, corporations, and military agencies build training datasets with rough and cheap labour. They often make use of old and conservative taxonomies causing a distorted view of world cultures and diversities.”³⁰ There is also a third type of bias, “algorithmic bias,” caused by “computational errors, information compression and the approximation of techniques of machine learning algorithms.”³¹ The opacity in the design and implementation of algorithms within training sets further exacerbates inequalities that are already present in data. As we will see, these three forms of bias are very prevalent in the arguments I will outline; however, some of the arguments refer to one or another of these biases more than others.

The Normative Trunk: The Resolvable, Systemic, and Irreducible-to-Things Arguments

The normative trunk contains a set of arguments drawn from the assertion that AI classification biases are resolvable. These arguments are optimistic about the possibility that AI classifications could eventually achieve an objectivity of object recognition. They are normative in the sense that they make claims about what we should do to fix biases and resolve taxonomical distortions. While normative claims can be applied more broadly to refer to how we should live and what we should do when faced with an ethical dilemma, I use the term “normative” in a more specific way to identify a set of arguments that are built from the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to solve classification problems. These arguments are normative in the sense that, because the biases are resolvable, it is our duty to resolve them. The creators of ImageNet who defend the 2019 revisions of the “Person” category fall into this category. Even though Crawford disagrees with their revisions, we can also interpret three strands of Crawford’s own arguments to support the normative approach.

Argument 1: Immanently Resolvable

There are those who think that by simply revising the categories of our classifications, we can set up an adequate taxonomy of the objects of reality that succeeds at fairly representing them. Correcting the taxonomy

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

issues with ImageNet's "Person" top-level category might require a lot of funding to significantly overhaul the initially flawed, sometimes arbitrary, sometimes biased or even racist, typology of things—but this is nevertheless fixable if we pour enough resources into the project. Proponents of the resolvable interpretation support ImageNet's strategy of revising and redacting the categories of their taxonomy but feel that the task needs to be taken more seriously. Pertinent questions for this branch include: How much training data is really enough to develop fair training sets? What measures can we take to uncover and revise categories and images that are deemed to be ethically questionable? Can more effective guidelines be set up to deal with privacy concerns and black box barriers that come from consent and transparency issues? What sorts of expertise and how much funding would it take to more adequately address classification biases? Is there a way to reconfigure the demographic distribution to reach underrepresented groups? How much of a factor is the sedimentation of problematic categories over time? Li Fei-Fei and her team at ImageNet have already addressed many of these questions in their 2019 article, but enthusiasts of the resolvable interpretation think that there is more work to be done.

This position has the advantage of being immediate and optimistic. There are real, practical solutions to the problems that arise from AI classification, and it is merely a matter of working out how we should fix these problems. In terms of the "Person" category, the compartments of the taxonomy need to be in touch with the spirit of the times and should be as sensitive and inclusive as possible so as not to further marginalize underrepresented or vulnerable groups of people. It might also be necessary to further revise the categories as time goes on. Annual or semi-regular revisions would help to keep the categories up-to-date and in line with the spirit of the times.

Although she sometimes entertains this position, Crawford for the most part rejects it.³² While she recognizes that ImageNet has made real improvements and that the categories are relatively fairer than they were, she also argues that there are still inherent problems with the classification system and that there is not an immediate path for further revisions that would clearly work. Part of her argument is that categories associated with a function or social role are obviously problematic because connecting images to them is usually random and subjective:

People are labeled by careers or hobbies: there are Boy Scouts, cheerleaders, cognitive neuroscientists, hairdressers, intelligence analysts, mythologists,

³² Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 140.

retailers, retirees, and so on. The existence of these categories suggests that people can be visually ordered according to their profession... ImageNet also contains categories that make no sense whatsoever for image classification such as Debtor, Boss, Acquaintance, Brother, and Color-Blind Person. These are all non-visual concepts that describe a relationship, be it to other people, to a financial system, or to the visual field itself.³³

But part of her argument comes from a deeper objection to the basic assumption that it is possible to form an adequate objective representation of the categories of reality. Underlying the advantages of the resolvable interpretation is the assumption that fundamental categories unambiguously exist and help to constitute an objective reality that is both discernable and relatively stable, reliably ascertained from a timeless set of essences. Even if the administrators of ImageNet were to hire the most sensitive, tactful, woke experts to overhaul the classification system, decisions would have to be made about gender, race, class, etc., that make essentialist assumptions about the fixity of being.

In a few passages in the text, Crawford seems conflicted about whether it might still be possible to design a fairer, more objective taxonomical network of object recognition. That she views the 2019 revisions to have made at least some progress implies that this normative project could succeed at least partially. Nonetheless, since most of Crawford's analysis is taken up with stronger arguments about power and the consequences of dividing things from things, it is reasonable to conclude that she does not believe that classification biases are immanently resolvable.

Argument 2: Systemic

There is also the more entrenched systemic variation of the normative approach: people who view classification biases as historically embedded in the social fabric of communities. The distortions and biases of classification are fixable, but it would take much more than redactions and policy revisions to redesign the categories in objectively neutral ways. It would take systemic shifts to clear away the latent biases hidden within our everyday presumptions about reality. For example, it would take linguistic alterations of language to clear away sexist, racist, and ableist prejudices that are built into the everyday pronouns and nouns we use to speak. Or another example: it would take a reassessment of inheritance and other legal biases to correct

³³ *Ibid.*, 140–141.

the systemic imbalance of wealth and historical economic marginalization of certain African American communities in the US.³⁴

This variation also includes assumptions about rationality built into the divisions of the categories that privilege identity thinking, organizations based on hierarchies, and formal inference, while suppressing alternative conceptions of rationality, such as dialectic, dialetheist, and rhizomatic models of inference. For example, we can interpret Deleuze and Guattari to outline the rationality version of the systemic argument in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* with their discussion of the arborescent and the rhizomatic.³⁵ Post-industrialized communities have for the most part prioritized arborescent organizations, privileging linear, rational, hierarchical structures while marginalizing rhizomatic organizations, which contain non-linear, non-rational multiplicities. Rhizomes nevertheless appear prevalently in nature and social life as the patterns of organization in, for example, ant colonies, wolf packs, cancer, capitalism, and the unconscious. Proponents of the systemic argument claim that it would take fundamental changes in the organization biases of contemporary communities to more fairly represent the suppressed non-rational principles that contribute to the constitution of reality.

Arguments from the systemic branch are similar to arguments from the resolvable branch in that both make normative claims about how we should re-design AI classification to resolve biases and match the truth of things. The main difference, however, is that while the resolvable branch aims at the immediate gratification of an imminent resolution, proponents of the systemic variation think that there are much larger historical and cultural barriers. Broussard explains this difference in the two arguments as the difference between conceiving of biases as glitches (resolvable) or as structurally embedded, while arguing throughout her book for the latter:

Calling something a glitch means that it's a temporary blip, something unexpected but inconsequential. A glitch can be fixed. The biases embedded in technology are more than mere glitches; they're baked in from the beginning. They are structural biases, and they can't be addressed with a quick code update.³⁶

³⁴ For discussions about racial bias and AI, see Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019) and Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018). See also Broussard, *More than a Glitch*.

³⁵ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3–25.

³⁶ Broussard, *More than a Glitch*, 3.

Proponents of the systemic argument believe that we are in a long generation-by-generation process of moral evolution. We have stripped away some of our moral prejudice. There are watershed moments in the US, for example, such as the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, which have led to greater gender and racial equality. But there is still a long way to go. Generally, proponents of the systemic branch claim that there is a direct link between our moral evolution and the resolution of the classification biases inherent in AI taxonomy.

Crawford outlines the main ideas of systemic variation in her discussion of 19th-century phrenology where she focuses on Samuel Morton, one of the leading craniologists of the century and his assumptions about racial divisions based on skull measurements.³⁷ Morton's classification method was viewed at that time to be a scientifically rigorous objective study of race that contributed to a long historical tradition of racial prejudices.³⁸ In his book *The Mismeasurement of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould helped to debunk the measurement evidence Morton used.³⁹ When analyzing Gould's objections, Crawford is careful to clarify that the flaws in Morton's arguments are not only based on the applied problems of weak induction, biased sample selection, and the skewed measurements of skull weight data. The concept itself of drawing up a seemingly objective science of racial division based on craniology is deeply flawed. Some readers might view Crawford's discussion of phrenology to indirectly support the systemic variation. Gould's important critical study helped to discredit pseudo-scientific racial classifications. It opened up the possibility for systemic solutions to racial prejudice and thereby to fairer treatments of race. But since Crawford then transitions from Gould's criticisms of Morton to a larger claim about how classification is inherently political and inherently produces power, it is more reasonable to conclude that, for Crawford, AI classification biases are more deeply entrenched than even proponents of the systemic variation would admit. As with the resolvable interpretation, most of the arguments Crawford develops in her work reject these normative solutions.

Argument 3: People are Irreducible to Things

There is also a third normative argument to be found in Crawford's classification chapter: the argument that people are irreducible to things argument. Proponents of this argument believe that because people are moral

³⁷ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 123–126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

agents and ends in themselves, they should be treated in fundamentally different ways from how we treat things. If we label people under the “Person” category in the same way that we label things under various “thing” categories, we risk undermining these fundamental differences and, thereby, reducing people to things. Crawford calls ImageNet an “object lesson... in what happens when people are categorized like objects.”⁴⁰ One of her criticisms of ImageNet is that because they handle the two different categories in the same way, people are misrepresented as something that is primarily of use value.

Proponents of this argument believe that an AI classification system that tracks object recognition *in terms of objects* can be a successful project. However, they also claim that there are significant barriers, biases, and oversimplifications that arise from labeling people as such. Because of this double position, we should think of the people-are-irreducible-to-things argument as a limited and only partial sub-variation of the normative trunk. In contrast to the immanently resolvable and systemic interpretations, which fully embrace the idea that taxonomy biases are solvable, this argument works by separating people from things and recognizing that while we can catalog things successfully, we cannot be as successful with people.

This argument requires a premise about there being a real difference between people and things in terms of treatment and use value. To establish this premise, let’s invoke Kant’s distinction in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* between people—who are an end in themselves—and things—which are merely a means to some further end:

The human being, and in general every rational being, exists as end in itself, not merely as means to the discretionary use of this or that will, but in all its actions, those directed toward itself as well as those directed toward other rational beings, it must always at the same time be considered as an end... The beings whose existence rests not on our will but on nature nevertheless have, if they are beings without reason, only a relative worth as means, and are called things; rational beings, by contrast, are called persons, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, i.e., as something that may not be used merely as means.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Kate Crawford and Trevor Paglen, “Excavating AI: The Politics of Images in Machine Learning Training Sets,” in *AI & Society*, 36 (2021), 1110.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 45–46.

For Kant, there are two distinct means–ends relationships, one for people and one for things. While it is fine to treat things in instrumental ways, it is unethical to use people purely in terms of use value. Of course, other people are a means as well—the friend who drives me to work every day has instrumental value—but it would be wrong and reductive to view people only in this way. Proponents of the people-are-irreducible-to-things argument believe that ImageNet’s current methods for classifying people endanger this reduction of people by placing them in vulnerable positions that overemphasize their use value.

There are at least two possible normative claims that could address this problem of reducing people to things: (1) we can attempt to refrain from classifying people at all or (2) we can attempt to redesign the person category to better foster the intrinsic value of people:

(1) Whenever possible, we should refrain from classifying people at all. The advantage of this interpretation is that by completely removing the people category altogether, we avoid most of the problems that arise from placing people into categories. The disadvantage, however, is that without this category, there would be real limitations to the range of what AI would be allowed to classify. The end result of developing an object recognition tool for training sets would be less effective and feel less complete. The project really requires that we establish labels for all conceivable nouns, including people, by doing an “ontology.” Designers might also object that in practice it is not feasible to fully separate people from the taxonomy, that people are an integral part of reality, and that there is no practical way to limit the labeling process. (2) As an alternative to removing the people category altogether, we can attempt to classify people in more sensitive ways to include their intrinsic value. Are there ways to label people that uphold their intrinsic value as an end in themselves? Crawford discusses the problem of how to allow people to give consent for how they are labeled by AI.⁴² We can interpret the fight for consent as a battle over the right to maintain the complexity and freedom of being a person.

It is also worth listing some of the central problems and objections that proponents of this argument would have to address to make this argument more plausible: (1) The argument relies on a hidden premise that the AI classification of people exaggerates use value and marginalizes intrinsic value. Proponents of this argument would need to make this premise more explicit and support it with evidence. Even though there is textual evidence that Crawford views the reduction of people to objects to be a consequence of AI classification, we can also interpret her to reject the

⁴² Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 109–111.

normative aspect of this argument because it is not clear that AI classification causes the pure instrumental use value of people. (2) The argument also assumes that there is a clear distinction to be made between people and things. What exactly counts as a person? Do animals count as people? Should they also be treated as ends in themselves? What about trees? Where do we draw the line? This is a problem that Kant faced with his claims that only humans are rational beings and have rights, but it is also a problem that resurfaces now with AI.

The Non-normative Trunk: Arguments from Power and the Technical Worldview

The non-normative trunk contains a set of arguments drawn from the thesis that AI classification biases are irresolvable. These arguments are critical of the classification process itself, even of pre-AI classification systems. Some even make strong claims about determinate being. But they are nevertheless appropriate for this discussion because they assert that AI classification crosses a line, exacerbating distortions and biases by upholding a false objective authority of what are actually subjective, political, and arbitrary decisions about the category divisions of reality. Proponents of the non-normative trunk argue that it is impossible to rectify the mislabeling of fundamental reality because there is no way to catalog things fairly and accurately but, nevertheless, there may still be ways to mitigate the damage done by AI.

Argument 4: Power

One branch of the non-normative trunk is based on a claim that there is a necessary correlation between classification and power. Crawford argues for this variation, as when she writes, “artificial intelligence uses classification to encode power.”⁴³ In a 2021 article, she and Paglen frame this argument in terms of politics by claiming that classification is inherently political:

Despite the common mythos that AI and the data it draws on are objectively and scientifically classifying the world, everywhere there is politics, ideology, prejudices, and all of the subjective stuff of history. When we survey the most widely used training sets, we find that this is the rule rather than the exception.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁴ Crawford and Paglen, “Excavating AI,” 1107.

Arguably her most controversial assertion in the classification chapter is that AI taxonomies are always politically motivated expressions of power. She attacks the common sense position that AI can measure and classify the nouns of the world in politically neutral ways. There is always power and political agenda embedded within the categories and branches of the taxonomies—from the largest details of the top-level categories to the most minute details of an Amazon Mechanical Turk worker's directions for how to label an image.

Crawford claims that even non-AI forms of classification produce political power, that the very act of dividing things into categories is political. But she also claims that because of the authority to project objectivity, AI classifications exponentially magnify the ability to control reality. Classification is the process of dividing things from things, individuating and separating them into common and comparable forms. Crawford claims that AI classification uses the power of division to bolster conservative religious and essentialist values. Let's take the example, once again, of the binary man/woman. A topology of genders that only recognizes this binary exerts power by reducing the complexity of gender possibilities to conform to essentialist preconceptions. And yet, the problem runs deeper than this. Even if designers of AI classification propose a more nuanced topography with multiple genders, sub-categories, and in-between gray categories, even these more subtle forms of division produce power. Proponents of this argument view power to be a necessary and irretractable element of the classification process generally and view the advancements of AI division to cause an exponential increase in the surplus, encoding, and hegemony of this power.

Although Crawford only mentions him in a few passing citations, Foucault is the obvious precursor for this argument.⁴⁵ Foucault's influence on Crawford's work can be traced back to Bowker and Star's *Sorting Things Out*, a text that Crawford draws heavily from. Bowker and Star present Foucault in their introduction as a central theoretician of their work:

Foucault's work comes the closest to a thoroughgoing examination [of the invisible forces of categories] in his arguments that an archaeological dig is necessary to find the origins and consequences of a range of social categories and practices. He focused on the concept of order and its implementation in categorical discourse... [His] practical archaeology is a point of departure for

⁴⁵ Crawford only briefly mentions Foucault in endnotes 12 and 66 of chapter 2 (*ibid.*, 250–251).

examining several cases of classification, some of which have become formal or standardized, and some of which have not.⁴⁶

According to Foucault, it is not simply individual agents who wield power and make decisions that enforce and proliferate traditions over time. Instead, power emanates from practices, institutions, and systems of knowledge (epistemes). Against common assumptions about the source and stability of power, Foucault claims that power is the product of a series of discourses that cause things to be ordered in specific ways, discourses that de-individualize and obscure the origins and workings of power.⁴⁷ We can apply this insight from Foucault to AI classification. Power similarly emanates from the divisions of AI taxonomy, as if from an indeterminate source, rather than from some specific group or sovereign individual. The pseudo-objectivity and black box obscurity of AI cause the structure of the classification process to appear indifferent and faceless—there is no one person or identifiable group behind the divisions and labels. Although the team at ImageNet made initial decisions about the branches of their taxonomy, and while they can still partially guide revisions and attempt to reshape the consequences of their product, AI classification outstrips them and runs its own course.

For Foucault, there is no way out of power relations. Crawford seems to endorse this position, especially when she claims that data could never neutral and that classifying things is always political and always the embodiment of power. However, we can also interpret Crawford to partially diverge from the Foucauldian model when she asks about who gets to choose how AI taxonomy is designed.⁴⁸ She complicates the Foucauldian insight that there is no discernable source to power by questioning whether the origins of power can be traced back to decision-makers who design the taxonomy divisions and place images under categories.

In Foucault's version, the reason why there are no normative paths to rectify the encoding of power, other than resistance as a form of mitigation, is because there is no clear source to the emanation of power, since it does not reside in the agency of a sovereign who wields it, since its true source is in the structure of the order of things as a construct. Crawford's version of the argument is different. By attempting to find the source of power in the "who" that is behind the decision-making process, Crawford's argument loses some

⁴⁶ Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*, 5.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 202.

⁴⁸ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 147. See also Crawford and Paglen, "Excavating AI," 1115.

of its consistency but gains resources for more robust possibilities of mitigating power. This inconsistency comes about because, on the one hand, like Foucault, she clearly views the power encoding of AI classification to be a necessary consequence of cataloging things. However, on the other hand, she sees ways to mitigate power although not being able to fully rectify it. Crawford seems to endorse the claim that if we could develop ethical guidelines about who gets to choose the foundational designs of the taxonomical divisions, there is a partially normative dimension to the argument that could aid us in developing fairer classifications.

Argument 5: The Technical Worldview

Crawford also frequently cites a second non-normative argument: the technical worldview argument. This argument is based on the claim that there is an insurmountable difference between the real content of things and their external expression when compartmentalized and organized through classification. Crawford can be interpreted to present this line of argumentation when she claims that AI classification causes a distortion of the qualities of things by overemphasizing their measurability and quantity. AI taxonomy nullifies differences so that asymmetrical things can co-exist in the same category. Proponents of this argument think that there is no way for AI classification to fairly approach things because the divisions of the taxonomy process fundamentally alter reality by causing artificial abstractions.

Crawford claims that AI classification requires a technical world and that this worldview both causes a distorted representation of the things that it classifies and causes them to fit into the shape of its conditions. There is a technical worldview embedded in the category divisions of ImageNet that aims to “flatten complex social, cultural, political, and historical relations into quantifiable entities.”⁴⁹ If we interpret Crawford to mean that the technical worldview is a permanent aspect of AI classification and that it distorts the non-technical things that it classifies by making them fit into its view, then we are committed to the non-normative position that it is impossible to ever reach an objectively fair and neutral system of classification.

Crawford and Paglen lay the groundwork for this argument by claiming that there are underlying theoretical assumptions built into the training sets of AI systems:

What are the assumptions undergirding visual AI systems? First, the underlying theoretical paradigm of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

the training sets assumes that concepts—whether “corn,” “gender,” “emotions,” or “losers”—exist in the first place, and that those concepts are fixed, universal, and have some sort of transcendental grounding and internal consistency. Second, it assumes a fixed and universal correspondence between images and concepts, appearances and essences... It assumes that different concepts—whether “corn” or “kleptomaniacs”—have some kind of essence that unites each instance of them, and that that underlying essence expresses itself visually... Images of people dubbed “losers,” the theory goes, contain some kind of visual pattern that distinguishes them from, say, “farmers,” “assistant professors,” or, for that matter, apples. Finally, this approach assumes that all concrete nouns are created equally, and that many abstract nouns also express themselves concretely and visually (i.e., “happiness” or “anti-Semitism”).⁵⁰

Proponents of the technical worldview argument claim that matching images to AI classification headings necessarily requires a set of assumptions that irrevocably change the constitution of things. These assumptions include the privileging of static, definable nouns over verbs, actions, relationships, and states of becoming. All things, it is assumed, are measurable. All nouns are created equal. Even the most abstract nouns can be expressed visibly by identifying them with images. These are not assumptions that we can expose and resolve; as the argument goes, these are assumptions that are built into the possibility of classifying things.

The technical worldview presents reality as a mechanical world, dominated by precision, pragmatism, and abstraction. The main attributes of this worldview are speed, generality, and substitution. By extracting things from their context, the technical worldview produces speed. By sorting things under headline categories, it expresses the most abstract generalizations of things while removing their particularity.⁵¹ By displacing things from their place among others, it enables the substitution of things that are otherwise unique. These characteristics are integral to the concept of data. The technical worldview is built from the assumption that things can easily be repackaged as data. ImageNet’s project of an ontology of objects requires a massive

⁵⁰ Crawford and Paglen, “Excavating AI,” 1113.

⁵¹ Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 134. Crawford talks about the tendency of AI to cause generality as a kind of induction.

amount of data. Collecting data is like oil “just waiting to be extracted.”⁵² “According to this worldview,” Crawford writes, “there is always more data to capture from the constantly growing and globally distributed treasure chest of the internet and social media platforms.”⁵³ Two conditions for turning something into data are: (1) things must be taken out of context and (2) quality must be reduced to quantity.

(1) Turning something into data requires that it be displaced from its original context. Text, images, and videos are torn from the context of their environments and given little to no background. This causes an abstraction that is at once effective at aiding the speed and generality of the classification process but is also alarming. If we assume that context and background are part of the constitution of things, then the process of extracting things from their context distorts this constitution, causing an artificial reduction or oversimplification. This is especially problematic for predictive crime AI technology, but it is also generally one of the fundamental characteristics of data extraction to dislocate things from their surroundings.

(2) Crawford also describes data as a reduction of quality to quantity. The technical worldview argument is based on the idea that things are qualitatively distinct from each other, but that AI classification forces them to fit into predominately quantitative measurements. The reduction of quality to quantity is a necessary condition for reaching this worldview’s standard of speed, acceleration, and rapidity of movement. This reduction is also an important attribute for substitution. Things that are otherwise incompatibly distinct from each other become exchangeable only if we are able to mute this incompatibility of their qualities and reach a mostly quantitative view of them.⁵⁴ The qualitative distinctions between things make exchanges cumbersome and slow to absorb the abstraction process of classification. However, by muting qualitative differences, we become able to sort things in terms of purely numerical differences, which greatly enhances the precision and rapidity of the taxonomy.

Some readers might object to the claim that the technical worldview is a non-normative argument, arguing instead that if we had more data, we could solve these distortion issues. In a provocative article, Chris Anderson

⁵² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁴ For a related book-length study on how the concept of money causes a reduction of the qualities of things to their quantities, see Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. by David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990). See also his essays about the interaction between life and form in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) and Georg Simmel, *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays with Journal Aphorisms*, trans. by John A.Y. Andrews and Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

argues that because we have now reached the petabyte age, it is possible to collect massive amounts of data at such a large scale that the old scientific method of hypotheses based on a model becomes obsolete.⁵⁵ Some might conclude from this that the reason we face biases and oversimplifications is because we have not yet collected enough data. But proponents of the technical worldview argument reject Anderson's position. They argue that it is not possible to have enough data because no amount of data could ever capture the qualitatively distinct ways that reality exists in our lived experience of it. It is not a question of having enough data because the concept itself of transforming the qualities and relationalities of things through technical conditions that turn it into data is the root cause of the problem. While some might view the normative interpretation of this argument as having traction, there is clearly more evidence for the technical worldview as a non-normative argument. The taxonomy process requires that things be extracted as data; but data extraction is the extraction of things from their context and background. It is not obvious how producing huge amounts of data would resolve this. Even if we were able to collect data at incredibly large scales, the technical worldview would still cause the same issues by forcing things to fit into the shape of their conditions.

Conclusion

There are two ambiguities to sort out in Crawford's work: (1) There is the question of whether there is any form of ethical response to be made that might resolve or, at any rate, mitigate the biases, reductions, and reifications caused by AI classification. For the most part, Crawford's work points to non-normative positions about classification, but sometimes her tone suggests that she is open to normative responses. She seems to think that, on the one hand, the revisions that the ImageNet team have begun to make contribute to a better and fairer system of AI taxonomy and that deeper, systemic responses could contribute further to at least limiting the extent of the distortions. However, on the other hand, readers who weigh the evidence she gives and the ways she emphasizes her positions will no doubt conclude that even the most heroic effort of redesigning the taxonomy will still fail to adequately represent reality. Her strong statements about how data cannot be made neutral and about how AI classifications are always political and power-driven expose her preference for non-normative arguments.

(2) Crawford does not consistently separate the two non-normative arguments, i.e., the power argument and the technical worldview argument.

⁵⁵ See Chris Anderson, "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete," in *WIRED* (23 June 2008), <<https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory>>.

She often lists the insights from the fifth argument alongside her more emphatic defense of the fourth argument, as if the two arguments were similar enough to be the same even when they are not. It is in itself valuable to clearly distinguish the two arguments from each other. Her discussion of power leads to a set of insights into the nature of data, political bias, panopticon structures, and discourses of knowledge. In contrast, her discussion of the technical worldview leads to insights into the oversimplification of complexity, the reification of abstract concepts, and what happens when being is fixed and not allowed to appear beyond caricatures and labels. Crawford clearly favors the power argument as the most important diagnosis of AI classification. Readers who acknowledge this and yet at the same time keep track of her other arguments are in a better position to visualize the various dilemmas of the normativity debate and what sense can be made of AI classification.

*Krirk University
Bangkok, Thailand*

References

- Anderson, Chris, "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete," in *WIRED* (23 June 2008), <<https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory>>.
- Benjamin, Ruha, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).
- Bowker, Geoffrey C. and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
- Broussard, Meredith, *More than a Glitch: Confronting Race, Gender, and Ability Bias in Tech* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023).
- Campolo, Alexander and Kate Crawford, "Enchanted Determinism: Power without Responsibility in Artificial Intelligence," in *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 6 (2020).
- Crawford, Kate, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).
- Crawford, Kate and Trevor Paglen, "Excavating AI: The Politics of Images in Machine Learning Training Sets," in *AI & Society*, 36 (2021).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

- Gershgorn, Dave, "The Data That Transformed AI Research—and Possibly the World," in *Quartz* (26 July 2017), <<https://qz.com/1034972/the-data-that-changed-the-direction-of-ai-research-and-possibly-the-world>>.
- Gould, Stephen Jay, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).
- Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Allen W. Wood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
- Noble, Safiya Umoja, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).
- O'Neil, Cathy, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016).
- Pasquinelli, Matteo, "How a Machine Learns and Fails – A Grammar of Error for Artificial Intelligence," in *Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures*, 5 (2019).
- Simmel, Georg, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).
- _____, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. by David Frisby (London: Routledge, 1990).
- _____, *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays with Journal Aphorisms*, trans. by John A.Y. Andrews and Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
- Yang, Kaiyu, Klint Qinami, Li Fei-Fei, Jia Deng, and Olga Russakovsky, "Towards Fairer Datasets: Filtering and Balancing the Distribution of the People Subtree in the ImageNet Hierarchy," in *FAT* '20: Proceedings of the 2020 Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (2020).

Article

On Virtue Epistemology and Artificial Intelligence in Education: Could AI be the 21st Century Transformation Machine of Nozick?

Cathlyne Joy P. Alvarez-Abarejo

Abstract: This paper aims to address the question of why no person should choose to be plugged into Nozick's experience machine to be instantly virtuous while touching on why the deceptive tendencies of AI tools in education looks inconsistent with education's epistemic aims. At the outset, I provide an account of virtue and what it means to acquire it. Following this, I discuss the concept of education from the perspective of virtue epistemology and its implications. In effect, I would argue that no rightly motivated virtuous agent would choose to attach oneself to a machine that will alter one's character and implant a desirable trait in the flick of a switch. Similarly, no person aware of the virtue epistemic aims of education will depend on the deceptive use of AI to achieve success in education. Essentially, human intuition disposes one to reject any action involving deception and a comprehensive understanding of virtue and education contradicts acceding to a machine-like transformation procedure. This paper tackles the idea that although the ultimate *telos* of acquiring virtue (and education, by inference) is to possess one successfully, attaining such an excellent state must also be consistent with significant virtue-epistemic motivations.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, virtue epistemology, education, epistemology of education

The Experience Machine and Artificial Intelligence

Nozick's Experience and Transformation Machines

In 1974, Robert Nozick wrote one of the most thought-provoking thought experiments in ethics challenging the foundations of pleasure-based consequentialist theories such as hedonism and utilitarianism:

What matters other than how people's experiences feel "from the inside"? Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience that you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, pre-programming your life's experiences? If you are worried about missing out on desirable experiences, we can suppose that business enterprises have researched thoroughly the lives of many others. You can pick and choose from their large library or smorgasbord of such experiences, selecting your life's experiences for, say, the next two years. After two years have passed, you will have ten minutes or ten hours out of the tank, to select the experiences of your next two years. Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening. Others can also plug in to have the experiences they want, so there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everyone plugs in.) Would you plug in? What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside? Nor should you refrain because of the few moments of distress between the moment you've decided and the moment you're plugged. What's a few moments of distress compared to a lifetime of bliss (if that's what you choose), and why feel any distress at all if your decision is the best one?¹

¹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1974), 646.

The 1999 movie *The Matrix* introduced the same dilemma of Nozick's experience machine. In one of the scenes, Cypher, an antagonist in the story, said, "I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing. You understand? And I want to be rich. You know, someone important. Like an actor. You get my body back in a power plant, reinsert me into the Matrix. I'll get you what you want."² At that time, he was closing a deal with an agent of the make-believe world created by the machines. Cypher has now acceded to the ill plans of the agent of the Matrix against Morpheus, the protagonist and the hero who has once freed Cypher himself. What Cypher asked the agent to do in exchange for his loyalty is simple: He wanted his body to be plugged back into the Matrix—a simulated world that creates a fake yet enticing version of reality in the minds of the people attached to the supercomputer. The Matrix is like a prison cell, but it is not a mere correctional facility that detains a person. It is a prison for the mind. Cypher wants to return to the simulated power plant and be the person he wants to be. He gave up his freedom for the promise of the comforts of living a lie and the bliss of ignorance albeit in captivity. The Matrix, particularly the mechanism that creates the illusion of this simulated world, is fundamentally similar to Nozick's experience machine. The process works by completely altering one's experiences while inside the machine. Essentially, the person who enters suddenly gets new experiences, all in the flick of a switch.

In discussing how virtues are acquired, Linda Zagzebski discussed the process alongside one version of the experience machine of Nozick—the transformation machine.³ Nozick's "imaginary transformation machine"⁴ operates in a similar manner: it subjects one to a process that transforms one into the kind of person one aims to be without the need to suffer from the toils and the taxes involved in natural acquisition. A person who is motivated to be virtuous, especially if the only goal is to successfully acquire virtues, may be tempted to enter the machine in full dependence to alter one's character, renounce bad habits and vices, and replace them with desirable

² *The Matrix*, directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski (Los Angeles: Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow Pictures., 1999).

³ See Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴ "We learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we would not use it. We can continue to imagine a sequence of machines each designed to fill lacks suggested for the earlier machines. For example, since the experience machine doesn't meet our desire to be a certain way, imagine a transformation machine which transforms us into whatever sort of person we'd like to be (compatible with our staying us). Surely one would not use the transformation machine to become as one would wish and therefore plug into the experience machine!" (Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 42).

character traits and attributes of excellence. Don't the ends justify the means of doing them?

If the machine, like the Matrix, employs deception to attain a desirable end, why is someone like Cypher attracted to it? Like the Matrix, the machine can make somebody different in one press without undergoing rigorous procedures. It creates a different person out of the individual who chooses to attach oneself to it instantly. As opposed to naturally acquiring virtues through habituation, the transformation machine helps any person who wants to be virtuous instantly by providing one with a means that requires less time and comparatively small individual effort. The only thing needed is to attach the wirings of the transformation machine to the body of the person. At the flick of the switch, the wires begin to transmit electric signals or something of that sort which cause the person to suddenly transform to possess skills, abilities, or, in this case, virtues while keeping intact the other aspects of the self. In contrast with the experience machine, the transformation machine only needs the person to be plugged to it once for a short amount of time, and it will do the job of imprinting the character traits or skills to the customer. After unplugging from the transformation machine, completely transformed by the process, the now-virtuous person begins to perform actions driven by the trait imprinted on him.⁵

AI Tools in Education

Artificial intelligence or AI is a very powerful machine that has vast fields of application. Akin to the transformation machine, it is very efficient while at the same time user-friendly. Its products are equally interesting. The machine does not necessarily produce internal characteristics and altered mental states; its products vary and the effects of using them are incalculable. This machine has now permeated every aspect of human experience. It has been there for quite a number of years now and has turned us into defenseless, dependent creatures under our noses. At this moment, it continues to evolve, reproduce, and dominate.

There are many fields where AI has dominated, but, specifically, in the field of education one can see how polar and ambiguous its effects are. AI use in education has been there for a long time, and its presence has drastically transformed the educational landscape. For example, undertaking research nowadays no longer requires scouring through physical libraries for

⁵ Although a different topic, there is a third machine conceptualized by Nozick - the result machine. While plugged to the result machine, whatever the person accomplishes in the virtual world the machine produces results successfully in the real world. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 44.

weeks and months to finish a short manuscript. Paid subscriptions to online databases of information that offer wide-ranging access to any type of data on the web supplanted purchasing bulky sets of encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, and many other books to gain access to up-to-date information. Complementing the digitalized resources, generative AI tools shorten the process of developing a manuscript as they do the work of producing text in one click in our stead. Indeed, AI has made the academic experience more manageable, time-efficient, and resource-friendly. To a certain extent, AI simplified the learning process but at the expense of genuine education and holistic learner growth.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the pernicious and terrifying effects of AI use in education became obvious. Burdened by the paralyzing effects of school shutdowns and prohibitions of in-person classroom meetings, teaching and learning shifted to online modalities. These online modes of learning delivery led to prolonged exposure to AI tools which offer the advantages of efficiency and convenience. The online systems run by AI suddenly became the only portal to learning and the only means by which one gets access to education. However, due to fast-paced developments of AI technologies, these tools were eventually wielded for unethical, deceptive purposes. AI use exposed humanity to threats of AI hallucinations and machine-learning biases, infringement of data privacy and truth manipulation resulting from deepfake technology and, from the epistemic point of view, to risks of being subjected to epistemic bubbles and epistemic chambers,⁶ and epistemic and hermeneutic injustice.⁷ Nowadays, AI technologies are no longer used solely for assistive purposes, such as helping one get access to online journals, soft copies of books, and supplementary learning materials like YouTube videos. Generative AI tools such ChatGPT, Nova-AI Chatbot, and Google Gemini, DALL-E, as well as assistive AI tools like Quillbot, Grammarly, and Otter can help in producing academic papers, thesis and dissertation manuscripts for degree completions and create digital artworks for class requirements. These are few of the ways in which AI misuse makes learners “deceitful” and “ignorant.”⁸ Even report presentations that one meticulously does in the past for prolonged hours can now be produced in one click of the mouse. Subsequently, because the internet holds boundless data from all available sources, what AI technologies can produce seem to share the same boundlessness and variety.

⁶ See C. Thi Nguyen, “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles,” in *Episteme*, 17 (2020).

⁷ See Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ Benito Teehankee, “AI Misuse Is Making Our Youth Ignorant and Deceitful,” in *Inquirer.net* (17 June 2024), <<https://business.inquirer.net/464083/ai-misuse-is-making-our-youth-ignorant-and-deceitful>>.

Instead of augmenting academic work, AI dependence takes over responsible student agency.

To an alarming extent, like Nozick's transformation machine, AI has the capability to transform one from an ignorant, clueless, unengaged learner to one who earns exceptional scores even without going through the traditional, laborious, and taxing experience of learning that leads to academic achievement and success. Today, a student who extensively uses AI can easily produce an academic paper or even an entire thesis and receive the same outcome (a good grade or a degree) without going through the same rigorous process that many researchers and degree holders went through. The recent phenomenon of "grade inflation" is argued to be directly related to the increasing use of AI tools.⁹ Nozick would have been surprised to know that a machine he conceptualized in his famous thought experiment to elucidate on the concepts of pleasure and virtue has now manifested in the field of education changing its landscape continuously at expeditious rates.

Notwithstanding the benefits of AI use in the field of education such as improved efficiency, personalization of learning experience, and accessibility, among many others,¹⁰ AI is a tool that is prone to exploitation and mishandling. While experts in the field of education recognize the good results brought about by AI use,¹¹ can it transform the student to become more curious, creative, and critical? AI use has many advantages in education especially when seen as assistive, complementary devices to aid and reinforce learning and comprehension among students of the current generation. All these advantages of AI use, however, carry with them a hefty price tag.

Zagzebski on the Nature of Virtues

Virtue Epistemology and the Concept of Virtue

Gettier complications have plagued the field of epistemology for the longest time.¹² The Gettier cases challenged the Platonic conception of knowledge loosely captured by the JTB (justification, truth, belief) components explored in the dialogue *Theatetus*. Being justified in believing in a true proposition (which is the fundamental account of propositional knowledge) no longer satisfies the requirement for knowledge as Gettier

⁹ See Daniel Lannin, Taylor Flinn, Alexandra Ilie, & Dan Ispas, "Unmonitored Online Exams: Valid Assessment or Score Inflation?" in *Teaching of Psychology*, (2025).

¹⁰ "The Benefits of AI in Education," in *The College for International Studies* (3 October 2023), <<https://www.cis-spain.com/en/blog/the-benefits-of-ai-in-education>>.

¹¹ See Aniella Mihaela Vieriu and Gabriel Petrea, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Students' Academic Development" in *Education Sciences*, 3 (2025).

¹² See Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," in *Analysis*, 23 (1963).

argued and successfully demonstrated that the conflation of the three components is not immune to threats of epistemic luck.¹³ In other words, it is possible for a person who has a justified true belief (JTB) to be without knowledge because the possession of a JTB may have been a direct or indirect result of the interference of luck in the process of knowing. The lack of immunity to and defense against Gettierized cases left epistemologists scratching the surface once again for a more robust account of knowledge.

To a certain extent, Gettier dug a lacuna for nontraditional epistemologists to fill. Epistemologists began to turn their attention to the pursuit of a possible fourth requirement that can fill the JTB gap (JTB + x). The search also entailed a closer look at the justification component of the traditional account and the possibility of abandoning the concept of justification to accommodate other alternatives.¹⁴ This is the space filled in by virtue epistemologists as they call themselves. In fact, they turned away from the traditional components which meant that the issue of justification no longer became too big of a deal for them. An exception is Linda Zagzebski who faced the challenge of reinterpreting the justification component and answering the Gettier cases head on through a comprehensive account of virtues.¹⁵

Virtue epistemologists focus on the importance of treating epistemology as a normative discipline particularly tasked to evaluate knowledge acquisition rather than describe it as opposed to the Quinean proposal of naturalization, thus presenting the “value turn” in epistemology.¹⁶ In virtue epistemology, tables turned in favor of understanding traditional epistemology notions like justification and true belief, using the vocabulary of intellectual and/or epistemic virtues.¹⁷

What is a virtue and what is its nature? What does it mean to possess virtue? In the literature of virtue epistemology, Zagzebski’s account of virtue stands out as the most comprehensive. While virtue epistemologists such as

¹³ It is noteworthy to say that some philosophers in epistemology do not agree that Gettier successfully supplanted the Platonic account of knowledge. See Moti Mizrahi, “Why Gettier Cases Are Misleading,” in *Logos & Episteme*, 7 (2016) and Peter Hawke and Tom Schoonen, “Are Gettier Cases Disturbing?,” in *Philosophical Studies*, 78 (2021).

¹⁴ See Fernando Broncano-Berrocal, “A Robust Enough Virtue Epistemology,” in *Synthese*, 194 (2016).

¹⁵ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 397.

¹⁶ John Turri, Mark Alfano, and John Greco, “Virtue Epistemology,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (26 October 2021), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue>>.

¹⁷ See Heather Battaly, “Virtue Epistemology,” in *Philosophy Compass*, 3 (2008).

Ernest Sosa¹⁸ and John Greco¹⁹ present virtues as similar to skills and low-grade perceptive abilities thereby offering a somewhat simplistic account of epistemic virtues, Zagzebski presented virtue as a complex, holistic concept that can quell the threats to the traditional conception of knowledge. In *Virtues of the Mind*, she offered a comprehensive account of virtue, examining it thoroughly, thus providing a virtue-theoretic approach in epistemology.

Zagzebski identifies several components of virtue, comparing it with many other items. First, virtue is a kind of excellence.²⁰ The word virtue originated from the Greek term *arête*, meaning excellence. Virtues are excellences in the soul. The soul develops these character traits through exposure, engagement, invigoration, prompting, and doing. It is in this sense that Zagzebski mentions that a virtue is “a property that we attribute to the person in a deep and important sense.”²¹ We do not morally evaluate persons according to their actions but in reference to their being virtuous. Zagzebski noted as well that virtues are those that are exhibited by great-souled persons, closely capturing the Aristotelian account.²² Though excellences include nonhuman excellences (e.g., even knives have excellences), it still captures one of the essential features of a virtue, i.e., the excellence involved in one’s being reliable in achieving the good of the motivational component of virtue.

Second, Zagzebski quotes St. Thomas Aquinas in that a *virtue* “is what makes its possessor good and his work good likewise.”²³ A virtue is always worth having, and someone who possesses such is of higher moral status as compared to others who lack it. “Virtue is, then, both a good-making quality of a person and a quality that cannot lead to bad use. Presumably ‘bad use’ means wrongful behavior.”²⁴ Because of the presence of virtues in the soul and their connection with the good, one is praised for having them. Virtues, thus, make the person and his acts praiseworthy.

Third, virtues are distinguished from natural capacities, and they are “acquired excellences” just as how vices are deemed as “acquired defects.”²⁵ To argue in favor of this, Zagzebski said, “An animal acting on instinct alone does not have virtue, even if the instinct is a good one, and the same goes for the human. We do not praise the natural capacity or blame the natural defect

¹⁸ See Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ See John Greco, “Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology,” in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (1993).

²⁰ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 102–106.

since they are involuntary.”²⁶ A virtue is a deeply entrenched quality of a person—a character trait—that one has acquired through training, or through habituation, as proposed by Aristotle. The agent himself is responsible for it, and as such, is creditable for it. This is what makes a possessor of virtue worth emulating: out of one’s volition, one chooses to develop such a virtue for a long period of time, in view of mundane temptations and as against one’s akratic tendencies. To an end, virtues involve the will and the resistance to temptations. They are states of excellences developed and acquired over time by a person who could have chosen to develop a contrary state.

Zagzebski distinguished virtues from skills which Aristotle failed to do.²⁷ According to Zagzebski, “Skills have many of the same features as virtues in their manner of acquisition and in their area of application, and virtuous persons are expected to have the correlative skills in order to be effective in action, but skills do not have the intrinsic value of virtues.”²⁸ To explain this further, she illustrated the case of a person skilled in speaking Japanese.²⁹ Speaking a language is a skill. A person may choose not to speak one’s language when called for, yet this does not mean one does not have the skill. This is where skill differs from virtue. Virtues need to be exercised when a situation yearns for it, and the non-exercise of it shows that the person who was believed to possess it does not in reality. Also, virtues are not skills: some skills are not worth having, but all virtues are.³⁰

Additionally, virtues are different from emotions or feelings.³¹ Virtues are different from the Aristotelian “*pathe*.”³² This is so since we are not praised or blamed for having these emotions; one is to blame for the manner by which one feels them. We are not to blame for being “emotional,” we are to blame because of how we let it get the better of us at times when we could have controlled them. Emotions spill out of us involuntarily, but virtues seek the involvement of choice. Nonetheless, emotions fuel our wanting to attain the end of our motivations, which is relevantly instrumental to the exercise of virtues.

Zagzebski also writes that virtues have motivational and success components:

A virtue, then, can be defined as a deep and enduring
acquired excellence of a person, involving a

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 126.

characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end... a motivation is a disposition to have a motive; a motive is an action-guiding emotion with a certain end, either internal or external.³³

A virtuous person has a motivation, a disposition to have a distinct motive, and this motive is an emotion that instigates and directs action to produce the desired end. As virtues are deeply entrenched, motivations are but deep parts of a person's character as well that provide one with a set of orientations to do what has to be done to reach the pursued end. And this is where the notion of the success component of virtues rests on.

Lastly, virtue is a success term.³⁴ A person is said to not possess a virtue unless he is reliable at bringing about the end that is aimed at by his motivation. A virtuous person is reliably successful in always producing the end of his motivation. This is so since virtue is strictly tied up with the notion of excellence. One cannot be considered excellent if there are cases when he is not successful in bringing about the end of his endeavor, unless the person is matter-of-factly not virtuous.

The Self-Directed Cultivation of Virtues

Virtues are developed capacities of the will and the mind to accomplish a moral or an intellectual good. They spring from habits (moral virtues) or mimicked through instruction (intellectual virtues)—they are learned dispositions to act in a certain way. Since learning a virtue is done through habituating oneself to acting in a particular way and training oneself to act virtuously in all relevant circumstances, virtues, when acquired properly, create deep entrenchment in character. This is why Zagzebski said in her account of virtues that a virtuous person could forget how to be virtuous if one no longer exercises it but still could regain it upon exercising it again.³⁵ The virtuous person simply has rusted, but he still is capable of being cleaned of the rust.

It takes a ton of effort and a considerable amount of time for a person to be virtuous. Here, I argue that virtuous individuals are like quality samurai swords. Like the samurai sword that went through a lot, a virtuous person has reached such a remarkable state of character excellence by undergoing

³³ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 109. Here, she discusses her accounts of virtue and skill and the notion of forgetting the two.

rigorous training and by painstakingly going through, in a manner of speaking, the hottest beds of fire. The virtuous person has toiled through all temptations to be otherwise and has been successful in achieving the *telos* of one's training. Like the samurai sword that braved through the smelting furnaces with the help of a skilled swordsmith, the virtuous individual is praiseworthy not only because one possesses a virtue but more than that, one is responsible and creditable for it. First, it is self-will that led to one's choosing to be a virtuous person, and one toiled hard and endured so many internal battles to be one. A virtuous person could have abandoned one's desire to be virtuous along the way, but one successfully achieved one's end by not turning back or looking away.

To further understand how a person acquires virtues, continuing on with the analogy of a samurai sword may prove helpful. How samurai swords stand the test of time is an interesting topic, and it involves several complicated procedures done by a skillful swordsmith. Mike Notis, a samurai sword expert, revealed how intricate the process of creating samurai swords is. He said that looking at the blade itself is simply looking at the surface appearance which underlies structural levels—the whole sword is a bed of malleable metals (the steel is iron, which is enhanced by a little bit of carbon, and whatnot).³⁶ Several metals have all been carefully mixed to achieve one strong blade. The process requires the excellent craftsmanship and technical know-how of the swordsmith.³⁷ Yet, the creation of a samurai sword does not only stop with knowing the right metals to use. It also requires the knowledge of the two types of blade weaponry: on one hand, a piercing instrument and, on the other, the saber or Japanese sword where the samurai, with all might, slashes.³⁸ And interestingly, as revealed by Notis, to complete the whole sword, the craftsman must be “able to put the right materials in the right place to get optimum properties for the entire object.”³⁹ The whole procedure is so complex that it requires expert formulation to be able to achieve a quality samurai sword. Indeed, it takes several nights and days, the right materials, and the expertise of a swordsmith who molds the sword to be able to produce such a masterpiece.

The same sophistication is involved in developing virtues within us. Learning virtues consists in using the appropriate methods and processes applicable to virtues. Let us take as an example the virtue of courage. You cannot learn virtues in a haste. Virtues develop for a long time and become a part of one's identity because of the time and effort spent. Either you learn by

³⁶ El Cid Gallery, “Secrets of the Samurai Sword,” YouTube video, 54:56, 25 November 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfgIM9UMpXE>>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

being trained by someone who exudes a similar virtue or by emulating the actions of a virtuous man for a very long time. However, it must also be pointed out that being trained to be courageous not only involves mimesis or playing a role. One also has to know how a courageous person would act in all circumstances that require the exercise of courage. Just as in the creation of a samurai sword, pertinent materials and ingredients are also involved in the acquisition of virtues. These materials include the knowledge of what it means to have the virtue of courage and the circumstances where the virtue has to be acted upon. Anyone who wants to be courageous should not just be courageous in the face of a hurtling vehicle ready to run over a weakling elderly passing by a street, one also has to be mindful of the other occasions that require the exercise of courage, like standing one's ground to fight for a belief, jumping from the second floor of a burning building to save a baby out of it, or defending a traumatized schoolboy from his bullies. While it appears as if it simply involves conscious learning of facts about a courageous man and courage itself, in time, through repetition and habituation, these would all be deeply embedded into the person's character. In time, all these will form part of the person's character before that person knows it, as virtue is self-effacing. Habits come into play whenever one learns a virtue since habits serve as the bed of fire that molds the virtuous person and creates an alloy of the metals required in being able to act out a virtue in every relevant circumstance. Proper motivations for exercising a virtue also have to be learned by someone who wants to be virtuous, for having the right motivation in acting upon a virtue is important to be considered virtuous. To achieve excellence in bringing about the good of virtue, which is of utmost importance in the exercise of virtues, one has to learn everything about the virtue in question through training and habituation whether consciously or implicitly.

Interestingly, acquiring virtues is a form of learning. As learning involves complicated mental and physical processes, acquiring virtues is also deemed as complex. We know that learning a story does not only take place when one reads through the words and the pages of the book. Learning also happens subconsciously. You learn a story not only by understanding words and sentences used but also by the aid of tactile sense and the other correlative senses, e.g., olfactory, proprioception, spatial, etc. Similarly, there are people who learn more when a song is playing while they read or understand better if they walk around the room while reading a text. From a broader perspective, too, one learns through experiences of making mistakes and improving one's understanding or actions thereafter. Much of learning takes place in us while we are not aware of it. The same thing happens to us when we acquire virtues.

The Incompatibility of the Transformation Machine and Virtues

A sound-minded individual would intuitively reject the transformation machine. Even Nozick himself, as intimated by Zagzebski, said that no one would use the transformation machine to be someone one wishes to be: “Someone wouldn’t use the transformation machine at all; it seems like cheating.”⁴⁰ In a way, becoming virtuous by plugging into the machine is like cheating on an entrance exam to enter a university and pretending to have acquired it through the proper means. Though nobody knows you have cheated, you cannot fool yourself into believing that you passed the exam—you know deep down you have cheated your way into the university. Engaging in the thought, however, Nozick quipped:

If the transformation could be used indefinitely often, so that we could accomplish anything by pushing a button to transform ourselves into someone who could do it easily, there would remain no limits we need to restrain against or try to transcend. Would there be anything left to do?⁴¹

Think of the effects of having a machine in the first place. Say the transformation machine is real, that is, it is available to anyone who desires to be someone one is not. Who would then keep the procedure at bay? Who would facilitate the procedure and control the whole thing? Would its results be controllable? Nozick also thinks that the existence of the machine itself is problematic because nobody will be able to control anybody who wants to undergo the procedure given that, ultimately, everyone would choose to undergo the procedure, and there is nothing left for human beings to do for the machine can do it all.⁴²

Yes, the transformation machine can ease our way into acquiring the virtue we like to have. But it really is counterintuitive to even think of acceding to such a procedure. The whole machine and the mechanism that runs it are not compatible with the way we understand virtue acquisition and virtue per se. This is due to the following reasons.

First, if a person desires to be virtuous and is properly motivated to acquire the virtue one wishes to have, one already could be said to possess a component feature of that virtue responsible for desiring to be virtuous. That component needs further exploration, but certainly, desiring to be a virtuous

⁴⁰ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 117.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

person speaks of something within that person that is already worth praising. At the very least, this person is virtuous, though not fully and completely because this person only has the motivation to be virtuous (the motivation component). It is in accordance with this line of thinking that one could say that no person who is properly motivated to have a distinct virtue, would want to undergo a procedure that could alter one's character traits and the ill motivations that come with them in a flip of a switch because it is still cheating. Either that person who wants to be virtuous does not really want to acquire virtue but only wants to be able to appear virtuous whenever one wants to, or that person does not possess the component features of virtue that are responsible for desiring to be someone of higher moral status compared to others.⁴³ If the person is the former, that is, the person doesn't really want to acquire a virtue, why attach oneself to the machine? One simply could just make it appear as if one is virtuous by mimicking the actions of virtuous individuals. But what should motivate one in wanting to possess a virtue must not be the acquisition of virtue, but the virtue itself. What would plugging into the machine be for then? Subsequently, if the person is the latter, that is, the person really has no tincture of the virtue responsible for making one want to be virtuous, it is arguable if one really wants to be virtuous and one would be willing to plug oneself into the machine that could make one virtuous. As in the previous person, what good would plugging oneself into a machine bring oneself, if one really doesn't want to be virtuous after all? Hence, ultimately, not any single individual, virtuous or unvirtuous, would have oneself attached to a machine of that sort.

Second, not only is the machine unfit to make us completely virtuous, but it also ruins the element of voluntariness of habits and virtues. There is something in the machine that involves fakery; it is a procedure that involves deception. A person who is virtuous is responsible for achieving the virtue that one has; one is creditable for having the virtue that one has. One has agreed to have such a virtue. That is why we confer praise to someone who exudes intellectual or moral excellence. Virtuous individuals are praiseworthy. We salute them since we, ourselves, know that human's *telos* is the attainment of a virtuous state. We, as it were, upon knowing our *telos*, would want to have a higher moral status than we currently have. It is human's *telos* to be virtuous—to have a healthy soul whose parts are in harmony with one another, as Plato put it in the *Republic*. But how would one be considered virtuous, if one has a character defect, which is a vice, in the words of Zagzebski? To have a character defect is to have a vice. And clearly, someone who would choose to attach oneself to any machine to acquire the

⁴³ See Roger Crisp, "Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology," in *Metaphilosophy*, 41 (2010). Here, Crisp discusses how virtue epistemology draws from virtue ethics.

results one would have acquired through ways that have not passed ethical deliberation, has in one's soul a character defect—a vice. You wouldn't praise someone you knew had just undergone a procedure to become instantly virtuous. One press of a button to transform will never compare to the struggles of the person who went through the painstaking process of natural acquisition to achieve a virtuous state. One would not only have deceived us but also oneself. No individual who truly wants to be virtuous must undergo such a procedure which involves a deception of some sort. It is indeed hard to even think of such a person as a great-souled individual if one has undergone such a procedure.

Third, virtues are deeply entrenched character traits. In a way, virtues are like permanent markings on one's character. They are acquired through time and often take pains. Let's say some person entertains the possibility of learning a virtue quickly through attaching oneself to a machine, how then would we react towards it? While there are chances that a person ends up being admirably virtuous, it would still be arguable whether deep embedding on the person's character really has occurred. Deep entrenchment and embedding into one's character are important in acquiring virtues. Although, hypothetically, the transformation machine might evolve through time to allow for deep and authentic imprinting of character, the effort to improve can never be fully credited to the person, which ties the discussion up with the praiseworthiness criterion of virtue acquisition. The machine could never replace the human aspect involved in virtue acquisition. Additionally, going back to our analogy that features the parallels between learning virtues and making samurai swords, learning virtues through attaching oneself to the transformation machine is like hastening the process of creating a quality sword. Though you would have a samurai sword in your hands in no time, one would not be able to attest to the weapon's effectiveness and strength. The process was hastened—you did shortcuts which are detrimental to the creation of a sword that will stand the test of time.

Next, virtues involve motivation. Virtues have motivational components, but it is not enough to simply be motivated to possess a virtue to be considered virtuous. According to Zagzebski, "motivations are persistent tendencies to be moved by a motive of a certain kind."⁴⁴ Nozick said, as intimated by Zagzebski, that the spirit of the transformation machine lies in its capacity to give a person who undergoes the procedure a motivational shot, so to speak, "a dose of motivational power which is primarily what is lacking in an akratic person. The transformation could then make such a person morally strong."⁴⁵ But, as pointed out by Zagzebski, to

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

have a motivational power to resist temptations and akratic tendencies is one thing, but to have a virtue is different. Having a virtue does not only consist in having the will and the motivation to have one (though virtues employ motivations in their being acted upon). A morally strong and a virtuous individual are two different beings. In effect, what Zagzebski is saying is that one of the two only knows the right thing to do and is motivated by it, but the other has acquired “a habit of feeling as well as acting, a habit of being motivated in a certain way, and that person is just not subject to the temptations of the morally strong individual” because of the virtue one has.⁴⁶

Moreover, since acquiring a virtue involves learning of some sort, the transformation machine is unfit for the acquisition of virtues. It is to be noted that the transformation machine, instead of facilitating virtue acquisition, replaces the complexities and rigor involved in natural, manual learning of virtues. Let’s use the example of the virtue of honesty. To be able to know it, one should get to experience what it means to be honest. And one can only have a feel of it if one is confronted with an experience where the need to exercise honesty arises. Say, it is during an exam that one felt the need to be honest. If one has answered the exam without cheating and has done so perfectly, one will not only have the feeling of what it means to be honest, one would also have the feeling of how gratifying it is to have succeeded in one’s attempt at acting out a virtue. As a critic of the transformation machine, I doubt whether the machine could provide the person with such experience of gratification and fulfillment from succeeding in acting out a virtue.

Virtue Epistemology of Education and Deceptive AI Use

A virtue-oriented account of educational aims is receiving attention in the convergent fields of epistemology and education in recent years.⁴⁷ One of the leading philosophers in the field is Duncan Pritchard, who asserts that cognitive agency, not only cognitive success (and in another way of putting it, understanding and not only knowledge) is a significant epistemic aim of education.⁴⁸ A virtue account of the epistemology of education places a premium on the development of cognitive character in the learners as an epistemic good in education, not only the acquisition or possession of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ See the following: James Macallister, “Virtue Epistemology and the Philosophy of Education,” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 46 (2012); Michel Croce and Duncan Pritchard, “Education as the Social Cultivation of Intellectual Virtue,” in *Social Virtue Epistemology*, ed. by Mark Alfano, Colin Klein, Jeroen de Ridder (New York: Routledge, 2022); Jason Baehr, *Intellectual Virtues and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁸ Duncan Pritchard, “Epistemic Virtue and the Epistemology of Education,” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47 (2013).

knowledge or skills, but the development of the cognitive character or the cultivation of epistemic virtues in the child.⁴⁹ Also, Ka Ya Lee highlighted the cultivation of epistemic virtues like understanding as an epistemic aim of education.⁵⁰ A virtue-epistemic account of educational aims supports the idea that education should not only be producing a competent workforce in the society but intellectually virtuous individuals. Such an account gives the education sector a weighty responsibility to train citizens for virtues and make people aspire for high intellectual and moral character. The pursuit of education is in effect a pursuit of virtues.

The following sections present the different ways in which the virtue-epistemic aims of education shows the incoherence and contradictoriness of the deceptive use of AI tools in education.

No genuine learning and education in the deceptive use of AI

First, at face value, deceptive AI use in education is plagiarism, which is, in and of itself, a clear violation of academic policies of truth, integrity, and accountability. In a profound sense, the ownership of the learning experience becomes questionable in the deceptive use of AI. Irresponsible and indiscriminate use of AI tools in education obliterates learning. Additionally, deceptive AI use is surrounded by ethical issues concerning data theft and compromise which are some ways in which data are exploited.

AI tools are supposedly designed to assist and not replace the role of learning in education. When one uses AI, one compromises learning to a very alarming degree. If education is taken as a pursuit of virtues, the learning process leading to it must be personal, active, reflective, and fruitful. Virtue acquisition involves the voluntariness and personalization of the process. What AI dependence does is to saturate the learning process and take away important elements that are central to the whole educative pursuit. For example, the use of ChatGPT or the Nova chatbot eases the process of producing an excellent academic paper, but what the whole process actually does is to strip off the important “educative” experience of writing a paper and robs one of the invaluable fruits of hard work. No wonder, when one gets an excellent grade from an AI-plagiarized paper, a deep sense of fulfillment and satisfaction no longer accompanies it. The experience is questionably

⁴⁹ See Duncan Pritchard, “Virtue Epistemology, Extended Cognition, and the Epistemology of Education,” in *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 478 (2014); Croce and Pritchard, “Education as the Social Cultivation of Intellectual Virtue”; Gabe Avakian Orona et al., “Epistemic Virtue in Higher Education: Testing the Mechanisms of Intellectual Character Development” in *Current Psychology*, 43 (2024).

⁵⁰ See Ka Ya Lee, “Invitation to Virtue Epistemologists,” in *Philosophy of Education*, 74 (2018).

gratifying. Academic achievement no longer feels delectable, worthwhile, and satisfying.

One may also argue that AI abuse in education hardly leads to educational achievement and success. Can one be called a successful completer of a course when one solely depended on the use of AI in the production and completion of a course requirement? Virtue is what makes its possessor good and one's work good likewise. A virtue is always worth having, and someone who possesses such is of higher moral status compared to others who lack it. Also, virtue is a success term. A person is said to not possess a virtue unless one is reliable at bringing about the end that is aimed at. A virtuous person is reliably successful in always producing the end-product of one's motivation for virtue is strictly entwined with the notion of excellence. Going back to the phenomenon of AI plagiarism in education, can the student successfully produce the same quality of essay if no tool was used?

At this juncture, one may ask, can the student even be called "educated" at all if what they have turned into after completing a course is worse than the state from which they started? The learner cannot even be thought to be virtuous from any point of view because instead of becoming virtuous and being motivated by virtue, it was vice that engulfed their motivations, making themselves vicious beyond repair. Hence, those who graduate without academic distinctions are even more praiseworthy compared to those who graduated with enviable accolades but who did it through deceptive AI tool usage. It is the character of the learner that matters more in education not the beholding of medals and acquisition of academic distinctions. Educational success does not merely equate to academic achievement. The latter is easily measured through numeric scales and objective metrics; the former involves poking through the surface and deep-diving into one's character growth and development.

Education as a virtue-epistemic pursuit that has intrinsic and extrinsic values

Zagzebski explains that all acts of intellectual virtue are motivated by the truth.⁵¹ How could this be true of deceptive AI use in the attempt to be educated? A genuine education motivation is not equivalent simplistically to a motivation to pass or ace a course. A genuine motivation for education is a persistent desire to learn through the process, in spite of the pains and the challenges that accompany it. Academic success and achievement, albeit a component of education in contemporary times, is not the sole and the most

⁵¹ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 186.

important marker of it. Deceptive practices of AI use in education might lead to academic success and achievement but not genuine education.

To a certain extent, the desire to get educated is already a reflection of possessing virtue—the aspiration to be better, to know, to be wise. This is where one can argue that education is both an intrinsic and an instrumental good. Why do you want to earn a degree? Because you want to acquire the benefits of acquiring one. You could have earned it in another way, for example, fake a degree. Why enroll in an educational institution? You know deep down that there is something that makes undergoing the whole process worth every dime. You may have been forced by your parents to study but there are other options you could have taken out of rebellion against parental pressure. This highlights the component of voluntariness in the education process which bears on responsibility and accountability. A person who might have been forced to take up classes could, by all means, dodge class attendance right after the school enrolment. Quitting and taking the exit door are available options. Yet, staying in academia, attending classes, heeding the instructions of the teachers—all of these are also part of one's options. In effect, the choice to enroll and the choice to stay enrolled are reflections of being motivated in the right direction which is an aspect of virtue acquisition.

The discussion brings attention to the twofold values of education: the intrinsic and extrinsic values of education. Using the terminology of epistemology of education would help here. Some epistemologists of education engage in unpacking and identifying the epistemic value of education. It is commonplace to think that education has an epistemic value, but what makes it epistemically valuable and, thus, a meaningful epistemological pursuit? Does education have an intrinsic value or is it only extrinsically valuable? Indubitably, education offers a plethora of benefits and services to humanity. For humanity in general, improvements in different industries and major technological innovations that benefit people's lives are offshoots of educational activities. For the individual, an academic degree earned opens many doors for professional growth and economic development. In both cases, we see the extrinsic value of education. But is there value in education that is done for its own sake? I argue that the intrinsic value of education is seen in how it builds one's character. Although the notion of studying for the sake of studying sounds vague, there is a sense in which education done for its own sake simultaneously cultivates the intellectual and moral character of the individual. Gaining skill proficiency, although it has extrinsic benefits for the learner in, say, qualifying for a professional license and degree, still makes the person better off than lacking it. The person can still use the skill in many other ways. Education does not only afford people platforms for skill development and technical competence; when done effectively, it affords one with other equally valuable human

gains such as intellectual dispositions to learn more, the desire to understand more, and other attitudes that make living more meaningful. Jason Baehr offers an insight into how intellectual virtues tie up with the “love for epistemic goods.”⁵² Education as a virtuous pursuit also entitles the learner to having dispositions and a strong desire for epistemic goods like love for learning and the appreciation of the value of learning and education achieved for their own sake.

Character-building as a paramount aim in education

Education as virtue-motivated may have been a strange idea in the past due to the saturated meanings people attach to education, but at the very core, education is more than a pursuit to possess technical and practical skills or amass information and learn about perennial ideas. Education goes beyond indoctrination (either of skills or perennial ideas); its influence is ubiquitous, and it involves holistic growth and development in the learner.

To illustrate, the history of education shows how indoctrination historically motivated the institutionalization of education. We see traces of indoctrination in the way teaching was done back in the time of the Greeks when people started to hire poets and orators to tutor their young to preserve culture and traditions. It did not come as a surprise that the great Socrates, who was accused of corrupting the minds of the youth and promoting impiety when he introduced the dialectic method of inquiry, a cornerstone thinking pedagogy which exposes one to truth and the understanding of virtues, paid the price of dispelling indoctrination with his death. In the Scholastic period, too, the time when teaching was formalized, the specific agenda of introducing dogmas and preserving dominant religious beliefs were the main concern. Although the idea of building a university where teaching and learning were structured also came in the time of Scholasticism and became a clear indicator of progress at that time, the main agenda still was the transference of traditional ideas through the translation of core texts from the Greek language to the Latin language. During this time, teaching was instrumentalized as a way of preaching; education became the primary means of indoctrination and preservation of beliefs.

However, the current general climate of thought in education is that it is geared towards character-building, not just amassing information and acquiring skills. Twenty-first century education goals are no longer limited to the acquisition of skills and abilities like critical thinking and other literacies. The list now includes character traits, attitudes, work habits, and values.

⁵² Jason Baehr, “Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice,” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47 (2013), 248.

Caring thinking, collaboration, cooperation, among others, are terms that are now being looked at. What this suggests is that having knowledge or perfecting skills no longer suffices, and students must have character traits that would help them become good, conscientious, thinking, and responsible individuals. This shift makes one think that, perhaps, educationists are now becoming more open to the idea that education must after all be primarily concerned with virtue acquisition and not really so much focused on the production of unthinking, uninhibited automatons.

In the information age more specifically, one virtue that learners must be equipped with is intellectual autonomy. Because of the pandemic, learners were forced to be the captains of their own ship as the online modality of learning compelled them to find ways to understand and process information without guidance, and they still are at the moment. Possessing intellectual autonomy helps students in a lot of ways. From filtering the things they see online and sifting through the information generated by AI, students must be equipped with skills that characterize responsible and reasonable thinking. Zagzebski defines intellectual autonomy as “rational self-governance” and “epistemic self-reliance.”⁵³ Elizabeth Fricker describes intellectual autonomy as relying “on no one else for any of her knowledge” and taking “no one else’s word for anything..., relying only on her own cognitive faculties and investigative and inferential powers.”⁵⁴ Zagzebski believes, however, that self-reliance is too narrow a concept to encompass intellectual autonomy; intellectual autonomy is much more related to conscientious self-reflection.⁵⁵ Zagzebski argues that there is a connection between “rationality” and “one’s reflective judgment of what produces harmony in the self.”⁵⁶

Independent and responsible thinking, which are component parts of intellectual autonomy, will help students develop values that make for good study habits which are definitely helpful in veering away from AI dependence thereby protecting them from being exposed to the dangers of AI technology use. If children are trained and taught to manage their own time, do research on their own, and develop their own learning strategies, adapting to changes will not become a difficulty. Again, intellectual autonomy extends far beyond being critical—it is a virtue or a disposition.

Now more than ever, there is a need to see education in general as a virtuous activity—an endeavor that is directed towards a good—a good that

⁵³ Linda Zagzebski, “Intellectual Autonomy,” in *Philosophical Issues*, 23 (2013), 244–245.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Fricker, “Testimony and Epistemic Authority,” in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, ed. by Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Quoted in *ibid.*, 245.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

has epistemic and moral import. Incontestably, teaching and learning are virtuous activities aimed at the acquisition of virtues such as understanding, wisdom, rational belief, and intellectual autonomy as mentioned. Likewise, teaching is motivated by the desire to make another individual good or in possession of a certain kind of good, whether in the form of true belief, or a virtuous disposition like understanding and wisdom. In the same way, learning also involves the desire to earn a “good.” From this, one can surmise that the whole of education is educating or training for virtue. If the aim of education is social progress and nation building, all of education should be seen as an avenue to strengthen the character of individuals regardless of the subject area. This cements the primacy of establishing a virtue epistemology in education for the proper understanding of concepts of virtue directly linked with educational concepts.

Going back to deceptive AI use, it is noteworthy to mention that it does not develop positive attitudes and good character; in fact, it gets in the way of it. Knowledge and skills can get one a job, but it is one’s attitudes and character that make one survive. Integrity, intellectual autonomy, truth-drivenness are character traits that are pivotal for professional growth even in industries outside education. Although hard skills are learned in deceptive AI use, soft skills are not developed through AI dependence. Design thinking and thinking out of the box are soft skills developed through rigorous exposure to the tedious processes of educational assessment and learning. Although hard skills like tech-savviness and expertise in AI tool and systems development are highly-valued proficiencies, the ability to regulate their use, intelligently and ethically employ them without compromising human values should accompany the competence. For Zagzebski, skill differs from virtue in the sense that some skills are not worth having, especially when they are used isolated from the exercise of acts of virtues.⁵⁷ Skills and expertise in deceptive AI use is one of them. They are simply not worth having when possessed in isolation, not like virtues that have intrinsic and timeless values.

Conclusion

The birth of AI technology and its widespread use, especially in the field of education, shows a case of Pandora’s box. AI dependence in education opened the door to countless possibilities of misuse, abuse, and exploitation. Instead of technology assisting us, it has run us over and has dominated educational systems, leaving learners to fend for themselves to an uncontrollable extent. Because AI use is voluntary and personal, a naïve learner is subject to seemingly harmless temptations of maximizing the use

⁵⁷ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 106.

of technology-driven tools in learning and education. The learner, thus, bears the overwhelming brunt of protecting oneself from completely being manipulated by this 21st-century “transformation machine” that has the potential to stifle human values such as autonomy and malign one’s character in effect.

People in the field of education are not without hope. AI may have dominated educational systems in ways that are difficult to comprehend, but it is also through transformative and effective education that learners can be equipped to regain their agency and assert their superiority over the machine. If education would be deemed as a virtue-epistemic pursuit such that the focus of teaching and learning shall now be character development and virtue acquisition, education can close this Pandora’s box and recover what humanity lost to AI domination.

In conclusion, I am reminded that although a machine assisted me in the writing process, i.e., I am using a computer in typing my words down, relying on my own rigorous intellectual processes and subjecting my intellectual output to critique and evaluation proves that I am not a helpless slave to the machine, but a rightful and virtuous master in the process. A true master dictates the extent to which the slave could influence one’s behavior. The same attitude should be applied to AI use.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities
University of Santo Tomas Manila*

References

- Baehr, Jason, “Educating for Intellectual Virtues: From Theory to Practice,” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47 (2013).
 ———, *Intellectual Virtues and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
 Battaly, Heather, “Virtue Epistemology,” in *Philosophy Compass*, 3 (2008).
 Broncano-Berrocal, Fernando, “A Robust Enough Virtue Epistemology,” in *Synthese*, 194 (2016).
 Crisp, Roger, “Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology,” in *Metaphilosophy*, 41 (2010).
 Croce, Michel and Duncan Pritchard, “Education as the Social Cultivation of Intellectual Virtue,” in *Social Virtue Epistemology*, ed. by Mark Alfano, Colin Klein, Jeroen de Ridder (New York: Routledge, 2022).
 El Cid Gallery, “Secrets of the Samurai Sword,” YouTube video, 54:46, 25 November 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfgIM9UMpXE>>.

- Fricker, Elizabeth, "Testimony and Epistemic Authority," in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, ed. by Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Gettier, Edmund, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?," in *Analysis*, 23 (1963).
- Greco, John, "Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (1993).
- Hawke, Peter and Tom Schoonen, "Are Gettier Cases Disturbing?," in *Philosophical Studies*, 78 (2021).
- Lannin, Daniel, Taylor Flinn, Alexandra Ilie, and Dan Ispas, "Unmonitored Online Exams: Valid Assessment or Score Inflation?" in *Teaching of Psychology*, (2025).
- Lee, Ka Ya, "Invitation to Virtue Epistemologists," in *Philosophy of Education*, 74 (2018).
- Macallister, James, "Virtue Epistemology and the Philosophy of Education," in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 46 (2012).
- Mizrahi, Moti, "Why Gettier Cases Are Misleading," in *Logos & Episteme*, 7 (2016).
- Nguyen, C. Thi, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles," in *Episteme*, 17 (2020).
- Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1974).
- Orona, Gabe Avakian, Duncan Pritchard, Richard Arum, Jacqueline Eccles, Quoc-Viet Dang, David Copp, Daniel Alexander Herrmann, Bruce Rushing, and Steffen Zitzmann, "Epistemic Virtue in Higher Education: Testing the Mechanisms of Intellectual Character Development," in *Current Psychology*, 43 (2024).
- Pritchard, Duncan, "Epistemic Virtue and the Epistemology of Education," in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47 (2013).
- _____, "Virtue Epistemology, Extended Cognition, and the Epistemology of Education," in *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 478 (2014).
- Sosa, Ernest, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Teehankee, Benito, "AI Misuse Is Making Our Youth Ignorant and Deceitful," in *Inquirer.net* (17 June 2024), <<https://business.inquirer.net/464083/ai-misuse-is-making-our-youth-ignorant-and-deceitful>>.
- "The Benefits of AI in Education," in *The College for International Studies* (3 October 2023), <<https://www.cis-spain.com/en/blog/the-benefits-of-ai-in-education>>.

74 ON VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

- Turri, John, Mark Alfano, and John Greco, "Virtue Epistemology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (26 October 2021), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-virtue>>.
- Vieriu, Aniella Mihaela and Gabriel Petrea, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Students' Academic Development" in *Education Sciences*, 3 (2025).
- Wachowski, Lana and Lilly Wachowski, dirs. *The Matrix* (Los Angeles: Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow Pictures., 1999).
- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- _____, "Intellectual Autonomy," in *Philosophical Issues*, 23 (2013).

Article

Comic Intelligence and Its Anarchic Origins in Modernity

Soumick De

Abstract: This paper examines what constitutes comic thinking in light of Agnes Heller's understanding of freedom in modernity. Heller famously argues that freedom in the modern age is based upon a fundamental paradox. Freedom is the foundation of everything; but in itself is groundless, making freedom constitutively anarchic. The paper investigates two key efforts to conceptualize comedy in modernity under such an ambiguous and anarchic idea of freedom. Taking as the point of departure Walter Benjamin's famous distinction between two types of experience of reality in the modern world—the short-term experience of *Erlebnis* and the long-term *Erfahrung*—the paper connects their relation to the concept of the comic in Charles Baudelaire and Henri Bergson. It further examines how they are in effect two different types of responses towards the singular tension opened by the paradox of freedom. Such a dynamic of modernity would generate what we would call the “problem of comic intelligence.” Moreover, the paper would try to argue that while Bergson seeks to overcome the anarchic *impasse* of modernity torn between mechanical utilitarianism of technology and the vitality of meaning and life, Baudelaire envisions a more complex image of modernity which cannot reconcile the fundamental opposition of modernity.

Keywords: Benjamin, Baudelaire, laughter, representation

The Antinomic Problem of Modern Freedom: Heller

In his 1939 essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,”¹ Walter Benjamin argued that the plight of modern experience emerges in Baudelaire, in the form of a struggle between two modes of temporal experience. The modern predicament is captured, according to Benjamin, in the tension

¹ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

between what he calls *Erfahrung* (long experience) and *Erlebnis* (isolated experience). *Erfahrung* can be understood as the process by which consciousness produces meaning by combining actual elements of reality from the individual's past with elements of the collective past. *Erfahrung* therefore is related to the production of meaning through the production of duration. Tradition provides experience with a sense of the past giving it a duration thereby producing the narrative which fulfils the demand for meaning. *Erlebnis*, in contrast, absorbs the shock of existence unleashed by a technologized modernity which is instantaneous, repetitive, and expressive of "homogeneous, empty time."² Here, the demand for meaning is exposed as a desire which remains unfulfilled and lacking. Time is experienced in fragmented, atomized form as the accumulation of successive instances. *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* express the tension of modern consciousness as continuously splitting itself between a search for meaning-orientated, narrativized, historical rationality and the production of a goal-oriented instrumentalized technological reason. The tension which Benjamin hints towards is made possible in modernity when the world starts oscillating between two sources of imagination: the historical and the technological, each caused by the emancipation of reason from all types of transcendental conditions.

There is little doubt that this tension which Benjamin identifies at the heart of the modern experience reflects a more fundamental tension opened by the problem of freedom. Our challenge is to situate modern efforts to conceptualize comedy—specifically the efforts made by Henri Bergson and Charles Baudelaire within this problematic of freedom. Agnes Heller's understanding of freedom and its relation to comedy can be very useful in this context. For Heller, freedom is the sign of a particular symbolic *impasse* of modernity. Freedom signifies a new foundation of modernity which emerges "in and through the destruction and deconstruction of all foundations."³ Moreover, freedom, Heller argues, is the *arche* of modernity which opens a paradox insofar as "freedom is entirely unfit to serve as an arche because it is a foundation that does not found. As a *Grund*—to speak with both Hegel and Heidegger—it opens the *Abrund*: that is, the ground opens the abyss."⁴

² Benjamin would propose a critique of progress as a movement through empty, homogeneous time against which he would contrast the revolutionary idea of a now-time (*Jetztzeit*) or fulfilled time. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 261.

³ Agnes Heller, "The Three Logics of Modernity and the Double Bind of the Modern Imagination," in *Thesis Eleven*, 81 (2005).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63–64.

Since modernity is based on freedom and freedom cannot act as a sovereign foundation, modernity remains without an *arche*—without a founding principle. It is precisely at this point when freedom is presented as “an-archic” —without foundation or as the destroyer of all foundations—that the aporia is simultaneously born and concealed. This paradox or aporia is therefore at the heart of the problem of freedom which becomes critical of all hitherto logics of the foundation of society as well as reality. Freedom becomes a problem in modernity precisely now when it emerges as an object of thinking. The modern subject is not only deemed free, but it has the capacity to freely think “what is freedom,” “what is its basis,” “what is the truth behind freedom,” and so on. This is what Heller calls the “dynamic of modernity” which allows a new form of social arrangement to emerge.⁵ Heller writes:

This dynamic consists of the constant and ongoing querying and testing of the dominating concepts of the true, the good, and the just. They delegitimize the traditional norms, rules, beliefs, and suchlike of any given world as ‘mere opinion’ and legitimize other concepts and contents of the true, the good, and the just in their place – ‘this is not good, something else is good’.⁶

Clearly what Heller calls the dynamics of modernity is its critical spirit to question all principles, to problematize all sources of authority and all principles of governance. The problem of freedom is therefore entangled, on the one hand, with the desire to problematize, which is a dynamic process, and, on the other, with the aporia of a groundless ground which abolishes all fixity.

However, Heller argues that the problem of freedom, which carries a paradox at its heart, is soon suppressed by offering a solution to the problem. The solution offered is simple: re-present freedom itself—which is absolutely contingent, singular, and lacking all foundation; in other words, anarchic—as the very necessity of modern life. Freedom insists as the only and necessary foundation because it is impossible to found anything on the basis of freedom. This is the antinomic configuration of modernity whose *arche* comes into existence only on the basis of the anarchic which is immediately suppressed. The paradox of freedom leads to a further problem. A second level of contradiction is produced as a result of the primary contradiction of freedom as *anarchic arche*. The freedom which fuels the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*

modern machinery of power simultaneously conceals any possibility of articulating any genuine concept of freedom. On this point, Heller notes that the paradox of freedom is not only unsolvable, but it is mostly not recognized as a paradox even though we are confronted with it or endowed with it in our reflection. In other words, although the problem of freedom might remain unsolvable, the sting needs to be neutralized by offering an immediate solution. She calls this moment of concealment “the temporalization of the paradox” when the problem of freedom is neutralized of its paradoxical and anarchic nature and presented as an *apparent* contradiction which can very well be solved. Heller, therefore, notes:

In my view, this ‘temporalization of the paradox’ is a normal modern phenomenon. The paradox remains unnoticed if groups that in one or the other direction do so with the conviction that if they can only manage to do the right thing the ‘other’ will disappear. They can regard the paradox as a seeming paradox that can be eliminated, or as a problem that can and must be solved.⁷

There are, according to Heller, at least two modes of the temporalization of the paradox of freedom in modernity. One way is to neutralize the paradox through a technological imagination where life becomes a technological problem which can easily be solved. The other way, of course, is to mobilize the historical imagination of modernity, embedded in enlightenment, which abolishes “otherness” by offering a theoretical or conceptual knowledge overcoming all forms of earlier prejudice of exclusion. Temporalization of the paradox of freedom therefore becomes identical to the closure of the problem of freedom in modernity. It is here that the problem of freedom in Heller opens onto the question of comedy.

The paradox of freedom which operates as a “a foundation that does not found” can very well be recognized in other forms. Heller argues that although the paradoxicality of freedom saturates modern consciousness it is hardly acknowledged in certain formalizations of knowledge. For example, when it comes to the question of universality or homogeneity and heterogeneity or differences, no paradox is allowed to contaminate the clear opposition between such categories. It is here that thinking through the comic becomes, for Heller, a crucial mode of intervention. Comedy, according to Heller, not only offers a way to *expose* but *formalize* the paradox of freedom without resolving it. This is perhaps the reason why comedy, as Heller argues, is impossible to conceptualize which is evident from the lack of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

interest shown by modern philosophy to take up the problem of comedy. So, in certain sense, comedy or the comic imagination passes diagonally through the technological and historical imagination that Heller identifies as the two sources of modern imagination. We can perhaps even argue that the comic imagination, which resists conceptualization, *de-temporalizes* the paradox of freedom. The comic imagination spells out the impossibility of the closure of the paradox of freedom. It re-situates the paradox of freedom in its original anarchic context.

In her seminal work, *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomena in Art, Literature and Life*, Heller emphasizes the impossibility of bringing all the heterogeneous elements that define the comic, whether in life or art under a unifying concept. She calls this “the undeterminable essence of the comic.”⁸ Heller underlines this failure of discourse to make “some order out of the disorder, of suggesting guidance to mark the way of inquiry into the comic.”⁹ This heterogeneity works, according to Heller, at two levels. First, at a historical level. The modern experience with its essential heterogeneity, embedded in an anarchic idea of freedom, aligns itself more to the comic than to a tragic sensibility. Heller notes that “it has been argued that in modern times there are no more tragedies. If this were true modern times could open the space not just for comic presentation, but also for philosophical reflection on comedies.”¹⁰ However, if philosophy is to take up comedy it must ascertain a certain ground which can unify the various comic genres as well as the comic experience of modern existence. The impossibility to do so is symptomatic not only of the failure of philosophy to provide a unifying concept of the comic, something that it is able to do for tragedy, it also marks the very limits of philosophical thinking itself which often fails to understand the modern experience. Heller notes that maybe it is the very heterogeneous nature of the modern experience that resists conceptual homogeneity making it inherently comic. She writes, “is the Modern way of life itself comic to a degree that makes comic presentation becomes impossible and transforms reflection on the comic phenomenon from philosophical, to a low-level empirical exercise, such as rude humour?”¹¹ Again, the problem of the ground becomes apparent. Heller remarks “but if we accepted that modern life is through and through comic then against what standard would we juxtapose it?”¹² We are back to the anarchic origins of modernity. Hence Heller is skeptical of someone like Umberto Eco who, in his famous novel *The*

⁸ Agnes Heller, *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomenon in Art, Literature and Life* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

Name of the Rose, argues that human tolerance is the condition of possibility of comedy while fanaticism emerges as the enemy of the comic. However, it is not at all evident that comedy flourishes in tolerance. She writes, "So, we should also ask the question as to whether in a world of widespread tolerance, comic genres would still be possible."¹³ This problem of tolerance takes significant importance in our age of liberal democracy and political correctness, where tolerance can be seen as working in the opposite direction curtailing the inherent negativity any genuine comic imagination carries. This is the kind of tolerance, paraded today, which allows only system-compatible differences to flourish and rejects any form of radical difference which reveals a trace of negative residue. Today's cancel culture, which significantly affects the comic imagination, can be seen as a byproduct of such a version of system-compatible difference.¹⁴

Instead of tolerance acting as the unifying essence of the comic, Heller provides a more complex but elegant logic. Heller argues that comedy, or the comic genres perform a unique but common function of formalizing the anarchic experience of modern heterogenous existence into a second order of artistic heterogeneity. Comedy as an artistic genre, Heller remarks, is akin to modern life being equally chaotic and heterogenous. However, comedy, particularly the high comic genres in themselves are also formally restrictive. They formalize at the level of artist expression "relatively homogenizing most of them, since they must all be subordinated to the structure, to the characters and the plot."¹⁵ This is what Heller calls first-order homogenizing which transforms the heterogeneity of life into the heterogeneity of the high comic genres. Heller argues that we must distinguish between two levels of heterogeneity. The heterogeneity of modern experience based on the paradox of freedom and the heterogeneity of the comic genres. This second type of heterogeneity which informs the comic genres is symptomatic of the paradox of freedom working *within* the modern aesthetic regime: anything can be art, yet art is also something distinct seeking its own singularity. Following Heller's logic, we can argue that the comic imagination as expressed through the comic genres is perhaps better equipped to not only express the paradox of freedom in modernity but the aesthetic regime which modernity unleashes. Heller notes:

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ The question of system-compatible difference and its relation to a society of positivity in neoliberal societies has been significantly developed in the work of the Korean-German philosopher Byung Chul-Han. See particularly the chapter "The Terror of the Same" in *The Expulsion of the Other*, trans. by Wieland Hoban. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Heller, *Immortal Comedy*, 7.

The second-order heterogeneity and the second-order repetitiousness of the comic genres can also be understood as a reflective distance from the first-order heterogeneity and first-order repetitiousness of everyday life. One could say at first approach, that the comic genre makes fun of everyday life and everyday characters, which they simultaneously present and represent.¹⁶

Comic reflection or intelligence takes place in the distance between the first- and second-orders of heterogeneity: between life and art. Through the restrictive boundaries of the homogeneous form of the comic genre (art) we gain a critical perspective on the heterogeneity of life. The formal restriction of the comic genre cannot be reduced to a unifying logic of a concept of the comic. This is the essence of comic thinking: it cannot be unified and made identifiable. The artistic heterogeneity of comedy affirms the experiential heterogeneity of modern life. Comic intelligence, therefore, unbinds any totalizing logic of reflection. Comic intelligence cannot lead to a unifying discourse which is easily recognizable. Comedy, by making fun of every form of everyday heterogeneity of experience, re-presents them or re-situates them under a critical lens informed by reflective distance. The second-order repetitiousness of comic thinking that Heller talks about hollows out everyday representations of their substance, allowing us to realize that they are nothing more than images. However, one might argue that comic genres are themselves forms of representations with recognizable formal features, which is why comedy is not anti-representation or anti-image. Comedy depends on images—or types—perhaps more than any other genre. Tragedy, on the contrary, belongs to the realm of the exception to the image. Tragedy seeks to demonstrate how exceptionality embodied in the figure of the tragic hero cannot be captured by any commonsensical image. Comic intelligence on the other hand cannot but represent the common sensical: *everybody knows there is heterogeneity in the world which nobody can deny*. However, comic intelligence or comic thinking takes this common sense as an object of thought and does not succumb to the temptation of merely representing or repeating it. Heterogeneity is not repeated factitiously without reflecting upon it by opening a gap between art and life through the intrusion of homogeneity. Heterogeneity and homogeneity no longer occupy strictly oppositional places but become entangled with each other, allowing comedy to simultaneously present and re-present heterogeneity. In other words, the paradox of freedom, which is the heart of heterogeneity, is able to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

expose itself as a problem. Comic representation founded on repetition-of-the-second order hollows out any substance which might claim to be the ground of heterogeneity and freedom of modern experience. The second-order re-presentation which presents and represents reality at the same time dissolves any effort to temporalize the paradox of freedom. Comic intelligence exposes the anarchic basis of modern freedom by transforming freedom into a problem. The fact that comedy challenges the temporalization of the paradox of freedom is the reason that Heller sees comedy as bearing the temporal stamp of “absolute present time.”¹⁷ It comes as no surprise that for Heller laughter is the quintessential sign of the present time unlike crying which has a different temporality. As she writes:

The circus clown plays his tricks before our eyes, the fool whispers his truths into the ear of the king, the Thracian maid watches Thales fall down...One can cry thinking of the past. Indeed, mourning is deeply involved in the past, as hope is vested in the future.¹⁸

Comic thinking is an index of the “absolute present time.” But, as we all know, absolute present time is no-time-at-all. Through the introduction of the “absolute present” the effect of de-temporalization begins to work in the comic understanding of time. Even when captured in the works of comic authors that might represent images from the past, they can only become comic when someone laughs at them in the present. This is the emancipatory moment of comedy which freely constitutes “situations and characters which will or can elicit comic experience, in the ever-present time of their listeners, watchers and readers.”¹⁹ Comedy expresses not only the paradox of freedom in modernity it also makes impossible any attempt to close or temporalize the anarchic origins of modern freedom by drawing our attention to the problem of the absolute present time: the time of *Erlebnis*.

We need to examine the theories of comedy proposed by Henri Bergson and Charles Baudelaire in light of an understanding of comic intelligence which de-temporalizes and renders impossible the closure of the problem of freedom in modernity. Following Heller, we would argue that comic intelligence does not offer a solution to the paradox of freedom in modernity but seeks to formalize it as a problem. The true radicality of comic intelligence, which is consequently rare, is to keep alive the crisis of freedom as a problem not allowing it to be occluded by any image of thought which

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

seeks solution. Isn't comic intelligence the ideal domain of thinking where every recognizable pattern of things, every commonsensical answer to the questions of everyday modern experience becomes simultaneously unrecognizable and non-sensical? To put it more concisely, isn't comedy the paradigm of modernity? This is our first level of problem which leads to the second level: Do modern conceptualization of the comic remain faithful to the paradox of freedom and the problematics of comic intelligence or do they succumb to the temptation of proposing a solution in their effort to conceptualize comic intelligence? Taking Bergson's and Baudelaire's concept of the comic we shall test the thesis that beneath any concept of the comic lurks the impossible problem of comic intelligence.

The Corrective Sign of Insufficient Impetus: Bergson

Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the meaning of the Comic* insists on not providing an abstract definition of the comic in favor of examining it as a "living ideal."²⁰ The work is symptomatic of his deeper philosophical desire to overcome the alienation of scientific knowledge from social reality which plagued knowledge systems under industrial capitalism.²¹ Bergson argues for an understanding of the essence of the "comic spirit" as a "living thing"²² which is expressed in his famous formula "something mechanical encrusted on the living."²³ The essay remains a study of Bergson's use of "intuition as method"²⁴ which develops the problem of the comic as something given to immediate experience that can be expanded to cover its multiple modes of expression through the singularity of this simple phrase. Unlike a concept which reduces all concrete, empirical reality to empty abstraction, Bergson proposes a formula which would function as a crossroad for thinking the comic. For Bergson the comic turns on the same point, capable of "re-turning" to the same spot—expressed by this formulaic prescription—yet advancing in many directions leading to different forms of the comic. This is what Bergson calls the "expansive force of the comic"²⁵ which follows the living

²⁰ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesely Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Rockville: Arc Manor Publishers, 2008), 21.

²¹ For a brilliant analysis of how Bergson's philosophy was conditioned by the epistemological crisis of his time which witnessed a growing rift between philosophical abstraction and social reality, see Max Horkheimer, "On Bergson's Metaphysics of Time," in *Radical Philosophy*, 131 (May/June 2005), <<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/on-bergsons-metaphysics-of-time>>.

²² Bergson, *Laughter*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 13.

²⁵ Bergson, *Laughter*, 9.

movement of thinking. He calls it by many names: the “comic fancy,” “logic of imagination,” and “logic of dreams.” The formula therefore resists hypostatization towards an abstract concept. It will not absolutize the different categories of comic imagination. This is part of Bergson’s larger philosophical approach to the question of thought infused with the impetus of life—*élan vital*—which is creative and intuitive. He would later call such thinking “supra-intellectual”²⁶ which cannot be reduced to the rigidity of habitual thinking but transcends into a pure plane of intuitive and creative living thought and is the basis of an open society. The expansive nature of comic thinking is the opposite of mechanical, repetitive thinking which is reduced to habit and symptomatic of intellectual stasis which he would call “infra-intellectual” which is the basis of a closed society. The theorizing process of the comic—generated only when the dynamic flow of life and thought encounters something mechanical, repetitive and therefore static—cannot *itself be static*. If automatism provides the *content* of comic thought, the form of comic thinking is never mechanical or habitual. It is dynamic and imbued with the living force of thinking. In other words, thinking about comedy is different from comic intelligence itself. As we shall see in Bergson, the latter is inextricably entangled with the comic material which is not free enough to gain a “living personality.” Living thought, which informs the expansive nature of the spirit of comedy, is therefore distinct from comic intelligence which is connected to the immediate corrective function of the comic material. At this stage it is important to underline that the Bergsonian analysis of the comic expressing his vitalist methodology strongly reinforces his dualist preoccupation. The distinction between the expansive spirit of comedy and the materialist function of comic intelligence is founded upon an “aprioristic and rather abstract”²⁷ duality which perpetuates the dualism between spirit and matter.

Let us begin by trying to demonstrate how the emancipatory potential of comic reversibility of matter into spirit (and vice versa) is, in the final analysis, compromised in Bergson, reduced to an aprioristic dualism of spirit/matter which proliferates into other sets like elastic/inelastic, soul/body, living/automaton, etc. As a result, rather than an articulation of the paradox of freedom, Bergson reduces the foundational problem of modernity into an already existing dualist logic of freedom as elasticity of living thought and unfreedom as rigidity of habitual practices. The dualism between the spirit of comedy (thinking the comic) and the materiality of the comic content (comic intelligence) has to be evaluated upon the backdrop of

²⁶ See Henri Bergson, “Two Sources of Morality and Religion,” in *Key Writings*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Ó Maoilearca (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

²⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (London: The MIT Press, 2008), 114.

the paradox of freedom in modernity. I further argue that this dualism between the elasticity of the spirit of life and the inertia of the material body appropriately fits into the immunitarian paradigm of modern biopolitical distinctions between *bios* and *zōē*—the former signifying the free, fluid form of life of modern political society while the later denoting the rigid life of unfreedom reduced to its bare necessity.²⁸

“Something mechanical encrusted on something living”—what does this formula entail? At times Bergson refers to it as “the mechanical and the living dovetailed into each other.”²⁹ In her fascinating analysis of Bergson, Alenka Zupančič demonstrates how the opposition between “something living” and “something mechanical” is truly the “the real core or ‘matheme’ of all other comic oppositions.”³⁰ It has the “expansive force” of encapsulating all the different comic categories of opposition such as body/soul and animate/inanimate and so on. Zupančič calls this its “principle of flexibility.”³¹ She argues that the formula implies that “in the comic the same element can stand at the two sides of an opposition.”³² Therefore, if “mind” denotes the living and “body” indicates the mechanical, it is possible that in another variation “body” might just as well stand for the suppleness of life while something else, like a piece of inanimate cloth, could stand for rigid automatism. Ironically this also marks Bergson’s limitation as he reduces the essentially comic relationship between something elastic and something rigid, to an *a priori* dualism made available by his philosophy. This is the dualism at the foundation of Bergsonian philosophy between what he understands to be life as creative change (*élan vital*) and the repetitive, habitual, law-governed automatism of experience determined by a mechanistic and technological imagination of modernity. In Bergson, “life” is therefore informed by an already existing dualism between an elastic, living yet immaterial singularity of the spirit and the rigid, material automatism of the body. These two levels of life are distinct and separate from each other

²⁸ While *bios* was the Greek term used to designate form or way of life for a given community or a particular group, *zōē* was simply life, i.e., what we understand today as biological life which is common to all. This distinction has been the point of departure for the magisterial work of Giorgio Agamben who has shown how any contemporary understanding of biopolitics cannot bypass the problem of these two terms and the way they are related in modern jurisprudence. For a detailed understanding of these terms and their complicated genealogy see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁹ Bergson, *Laughter*, 24.

³⁰ Zupančič argues that though there have been previous thinkers who have tried to identify the comic essence as inversion of opposing categories arranged hierarchically—mind-body, divine-human, human-animal, etc.—Bergson’s formulation is singular because of its flexible nature. See Zupančič, *Odd One In*, 112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

³² *Ibid.*, 112–113.

held in a hierarchic relation: the immaterial spirit of life being superior to the rigid materiality of life. And since each level is an autonomous discrete order, they are identifiable singular categories even though one claims to be open (immaterial life) and the other closed (material life). The problem, however, with such an understanding of life is that the *pure* immaterial life of the spirit becomes an abstract (utopian) concept while material everyday life is seen as rigid and repetitive, which remains alienated from the fluid spirit of existence. This pure concept of life therefore becomes self-identical. It answers positively the question: Can life be reduced to itself completely? For Bergson, the crucial question remains how to overcome life's mechanicity, its automatism so that life comes to identify with itself on another plane. Behind such an abstract dualist understanding of life lurks a monism which anticipates a concept of life which transcends all the rigid symptoms of material existence. Rather than *producing* a dualism as the effect of an original paradox between matter and spirit, which according to Zupančič is the true function of the comic logic, Bergson reverts to an already existing dualism between the openness of an immaterial transcendental life and the *closedness* of everyday mechanical immanent existence in order to explain his idea of the comic. Zupančič argues that genuine comic duality is something different. It articulates the paradoxical nature of the comic split *within life itself*. Here the concept of life fails to coincide with itself. In this comic concept of life, while the abstract pure idea of life (self) tries to pull away from the material inelasticity of habitual existence (other) it is pulled back into it with redoubled force. What we experience as mechanicity of life is nothing other than the paradoxical relation between spirit and matter. Further, what we experience as mechanicity, repetition, or rigidity is the externalization of this relation into an object-form. If previously elasticity and inelasticity belonged to two separate and autonomous planes, now with comic dualism they start existing as an intersection which is given the shape of an object. Comic life is this rigidified intersection between pure and impure life instead of an ideal singular life detached from the discreet plane of material inelastic life. This life is a kind of "one" which repeats itself but cannot coincide with itself yet cannot completely detach itself either to produce another "one." It is what Zupančič calls the "inconsistency of the One"³³ which is the essence of comic duality. Seen from this angle, the spirit of comic thinking and the materiality of comic intelligence can either be placed as two autonomous modes of thinking which presupposes hierarchy and a metaphysical return to a transcendental moment of thinking. Or comic intelligence can be seen as the torsion of thought itself in its effort to inscribe the substance of thought onto the subject of thought.

³³ *Ibid.*, 123.

Bergson is aware that the comic cannot survive without exposing the discontinuity where previously we found only a consistent whole. However, he never develops this mode of thinking comic dualism.³⁴ Bergson's principal formula—the double binding of the elasticity of life and the inelasticity of the mechanical configuration encrusted upon it—can very well be argued from this perspective. As I tried to illustrate, rather than envisaging them as separate orders brought together in the comic, Zupančič argues that comedy unlocks the constitutive paradox of life: mechanical repetition is the basis of the singularity of life. Bergson never pursues this line of argument. Too hasty to analyze the complication of comic duality which he himself introduced, Bergson distorts the radical possibility of comic paradox reducing it to an *a priori* dualism which seems to follow the pattern similar to the “spontaneous afterimage” that Benjamin indicates. The *a priori* nature of the dualism acting as a complementary image perceived by the eye as it shuts itself to the inaugural reality of laughter where two configurations—“elasticity” and “inelasticity”—coincide and separate simultaneously. Rather than arguing, as Zupančič does, for an opposition which is produced *retroactively* because of an originary paradox between the singularity of life and the mechanicity of its repetition, Bergson has a *puritanical* approach.

Confronted with the contradiction of modern life, Bergson wants to retroactively return to an already existing discreet order of life. I would argue that this retroactive operation to return to a pure order of life is how we can understand Benjamin's statement that in Bergson we see the “spontaneous afterimage” of modern alienation. Through the spirit of the comic Bergson wants to return the pure elasticity of life to its discreet transcendental domain separate from the impure rigidity of reality. Closing his eyes to the alienation of modern life effacing all its inconsistencies introduced by rigidity, stasis, and finally death, Bergson searches for that utopic vision of pure life.³⁵

³⁴ Bergson is aware of the paradox of comic dualism. While talking about “reciprocal interference of series,” he argues for an overlapping of two separate series to produce a unified but heterogeneous series. It is a kind of overlapping where one is not sure whether it is a new unified albeit heterogeneous series or two separate series. This is quite different from a simple dualism of two separate elements. Other examples are also present. For example, when he analyzes absurdity as irrational rationality comparable to dream logic, he reproduces a famous interaction between Mark Twain and a reporter where Twain plays on the doubling of his identity with his dead brother William. It is a case study of comic confusion of dual identity which follows the logic of an “inconsistent One.” *Ibid.*, 89–91.

³⁵ Max Horkheimer would identify this problem, suppression of death, in the general Bergsonian philosophy as a return to metaphysics—a metaphysics of time—in spite of Bergson's idea of *durée* as a philosophy of time based on constant change. Horkheimer argues that in his concept of *durée* Bergson wants to overcome the existent metaphysics of time which he shows hypostatizes the concept of time by reducing it to spatialized moments or discrete instances which follow a linear pattern. Through *durée* Bergson wants to set up a concept of time which does not coincide with spatialized, extensive reality but follows the logic of time as pure movement

In his theory of the comic, this “return” is envisioned by the *corrective* principle of the comic. Social life corrects itself by exposing the mechanical, repetitive elements of society and by the same process eliminates them: “This rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective.”³⁶ Comedy therefore operates very similar to a form of social catharsis, Bergson calls it “social ragging,”³⁷ where certain rigidity of habits has to be eliminated by evoking them comically. But what does it entail? How can social inelasticity be exposed and rectified by comedy? Here again Bergson displays his subtle understanding of how the comic operates when he illustrates the method of comic externalization of affects. Talking of emotions and its relation to action, Bergson observes that tragic action evokes the fluidity of an emotion seamlessly flowing into action. Action becomes inseparable from emotion expressing the singular interiority of the *individual* character which in turn infects the audience emotionally. In comedy, the same emotion which provokes tears in tragedy causes us to laugh because it is immediately *generalized* hence avoiding the tragic quality of pitching the individuality of the character against fate or destiny. This is the Bergsonian distinction between tragic action and comic gesture. Comic gestures do not invoke the exclusive interiority of the character. It externalizes the emotion, isolates it, and gives it an independent existence like a “parasitic organism.”³⁸ The character is so completely saturated by the independent existence of an emotion that it loses all its individuality and becomes what Benjamin would call a “citation.”³⁹ Talking of the Brechtian use of gesture, Benjamin would propose his famous idea of a “dialectic at standstill” which explodes times, introducing a kind of reflux or astonishment which makes visible the very condition of its production. Comic gesture, according to Bergson, performs something similar: the “explosive”⁴⁰ function of “citing” the emotion, generalizing it, and therefore awakening the audience from its emotional reveries.

of an intensive experience. However, the fact that Bergson de-historicizes time as change by negating the finite human experience prompts Horkheimer to argue that the “suppression of death” and the promise of eternal life makes Bergson into a new metaphysician who promises a new eternity of ever-changing life. Human life which is informed by continuous change is nevertheless exposed to the discontinuity of death—as the ultimate stasis. One can even argue that death is the inconsistency in the consistent flow of life which has to be effaced to return to an eternal life. See Horkheimer, “On Bergson’s Metaphysics of Time,” 9–19.

³⁶ Bergson, *Laughter*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁹ See Walter Benjamin, “What Is Epic Theater?,” in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998).

⁴⁰ Bergson, *Laughter*, 69–71.

Unlike Brecht where the gesture, according to Benjamin, has the revolutionary function of waking the audience not only from the emotive and immersive reality of the stage but also from bourgeois society, Bergson sees the potential of comic gesture having a cathartic function of purification. It rids society of its rigidity and returns it to its suppleness which is necessary for any sociability. The purificatory function of social catharsis starts resembling the immunitary function of modern social imagination which tries to isolate itself as a separate autonomous entity (community) unified and protected against the dangers of modern dissipations of life. Therefore, laughter as a form of social catharsis starts coinciding with one of the essential categories of modernity: the biopolitical category of immunity and its antinomic relation to the modern concept of community.⁴¹ This relation between the comic function of social catharsis and the immunitary logic becomes evident when Bergson talks of laughter and how it tries to rectify society. Bergson writes:

We should see that vanity, though it is a natural product of social life, is an inconvenience to society, just as certain slight poisons, continually secreted by the human organism, would destroy it in the long run, if they were not neutralized by other secretions. Laughter is unceasingly doing work of this kind. In this respect, it might be said that the specific remedy for vanity is laughter...⁴²

This is the pharmacological basis of immunity that comic laughter articulates. It injects society with that very disease: mechanicity, automatism, rigidity or absentmindedness which can “destroy it in the long run.” Bergson regards absentmindedness as nothing other than the rigidity of mind which is unable to adapt to the flow of reality it encounters in life. It is like something which “lives upon him without forming part of his organism, after the fashion

⁴¹ See Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. by Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011). While this essay was being written, we were witnessing one of the most serious medical crises of our times, in the form of the corona virus pandemic. While there was a serious medical concern and scientific basis for the crisis, it also exposed the category of immunization as a fundamental basis of modern society which pathologizes the other and consolidates common identity on the basis of individual security. What we witnessed during the pandemic in a brutal fashion was already dormant in the alienating mechanicity of life in early modernity which Bergson was so antithetical towards and against which he conceived a philosophy of “contagious” life.

⁴² Bergson, *Laughter*, 82.

of a parasite; that is the reason this state of mind is observable from without and capable of being corrected”⁴³ by laughter.

Laughter exposes this immunitarian paradigm of society and tries to correct it. Laughter itself cannot be fused with creative life, but it can provide protection against rigidity. Such is the paradoxical state of laughter when seen through immunitarian logic. For Bergson, laughter is caught in a double bind because of its symptomatic as well as curative function. He seeks to diagnose the immunitarian crisis of modern life through the symptom of laughter while simultaneously trying to cure society against this crisis through laughter. Comedy therefore cannot be categorized as art like poetry or tragedy. These latter are antithetical to society and closer to nature while comedy has a social function. Moreover, the generalizing factor of comedy⁴⁴ is devoid of emotions and merely appeals to intelligence. Unlike tragedy which, true to all genuine artistic processes, displays the singularity of experience and elicits sympathy from the audience, comedy provokes no emotional contagion. Comic intelligence produces a shared sensibility which is culturally determined such that they can “share the joke” so to speak. Comedy, Bergson argues, is never meant for all humankind. It is something which creates small, *closed* groups because laughter does not provoke sympathy in the expansive and contagious fashion of tragedy and the affects of suffering it generates. Comedy merely unveils what is lost behind the utilitarian, obligatory habits of a closed society—a society of small groups which are locked in the immunitarian paradigm. Comic intelligence does not belong to the spiritual domain of artistic thinking because of its material nature—it exposes and corrects the rigidity of material practices of such closed societies. Comedy therefore belongs to the material domain of culture while art has the natural-universal, expansive importance of creative life. Laughter is caught in this *a priori* dualism between elastic-inelastic, nature-culture, open-close. For Bergson, one domain must be separated from the other; the open and dynamic society has to be protected from becoming static and closed. Comic intelligence though not creative has to ensure that creative, meaningful experiences (*Erfahrung*) remain immune from the entropy of modern material experience (*Erlebnis*). The paradox of immunity leads to the maintenance of a dualist hierarchy of two levels of reality. The limitation of Bergson’s theory of comedy seems to be underpinned by his dualist approach to materialism.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁴ The generalizing tendency of the comic has been pointed out by both Zupančič and Mladen Dolar. See Zupančič, *Odd One In*, 22–40. Also see Mladen Dolar, “The Comic Mimesis,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 43 (Winter 2017).

The Object Sign of Power: Baudelaire

In his essay "Of the Essence of Laughter and generally of the Comic in the Plastic Arts," Baudelaire writes, "The wise man laughs only in fear and trembling."⁴⁵ He argues that the comic unequivocally belongs to the domain of the profane such that "the wise man is afraid to laugh, just as he is afraid of profane entertainments or concupiscence."⁴⁶ And because the "Incarnate Word has never laughed,"⁴⁷ laughter can never belong to the sacred domain of the divine absolute. This is the "essence of laughter," if there is any, in Baudelaire's essay. Laughter inevitably evokes relativity because it "disappears at the level of absolute knowledge and power."⁴⁸ Like the profane domain of human existence, laughter is relative to an original degradation, an original fall. Laughter is satanic⁴⁹ because it comes from human's idea of one's own superiority which is made possible only because of an original *degradation*. Therefore, its "satanic" character also makes laughter profoundly human because it belongs to the profane domain of human existence. Baudelaire writes:

In man it is the consequence of his idea of his own superiority; and in fact, since laughter is essentially human it is essentially contradictory, that is to say it is one and the same time a sign of infinite greatness and of infinite wretchedness, infinite wretchedness in relation to the absolute being, of whom man has an inkling, infinite greatness in relation to the beasts. It is from the constant clash of these two infinities that laughter flows.⁵⁰

Comic relativity cancels its presence in absolute spaces: there is no comedy in paradise, neither in the Garden of Eden nor in any socialist utopia though there might be joy. I argue that this immanence of laughter in Baudelaire can be seen from a genuinely materialist point of view. It means

⁴⁵ Charles Baudelaire, "Of the Essence of Laughter, and Generally of the Comic in the Plastic Arts," in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 141.

⁴⁶ Baudelaire, "Essence of Laughter," 142.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Baudelaire would associate figures like Satan and Cain with the proletariat and their spirit of revolt in his *Flowers of Evil*. For a detailed analysis of the image of Satan, see Walter Benjamin, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 56–57.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

that the one who laughs does not merely laugh at an object against which one finds oneself superior. There is no absolute position of superiority available because there is no transcendence available outside the world. Therefore, laughter becomes the expression of a relation between transcendence and immanence, between spirit and matter *within* immanence, within the profane order. Laughter itself is the externalization or “objectification” of this relation. It is not some laughing subject placed in relation to the object eliciting laughter. I argue that in Baudelaire laughter as the expression of a pure relation implies a subject in relation to itself and this relation is non-identical. The self’s non-coincidence with itself. In other words, laughter exposes a paradox. Degradation is the *causa sui* of “pride.” The human being’s idea of her own superiority also reveals her place in the profane order, her degradation. This, I argue is the materialist basis of Baudelaire’s thinking which cannot be reduced to any simple dualism.

But is Baudelairean laughter not the effect of another *a priori* dualism, much like Bergson, between the sacred and the profane? Here we must return to the theological understanding of the “fall” in Baudelaire. For Baudelaire, the fall is nothing other than an accidental degradation: “it is certain that human laughter is intimately connected with the accident of an ancient fall, of physical and moral degradation.”⁵¹ This is not merely a Christian theological understanding. In fact, Baudelaire consciously develops a “poetic supposition” to underline his historical point of view of the fall. He is not interested in any mystical understanding of the original degradation of human. At the same time, his understanding of comic degradation is very different from Bergson for whom degradation, like exaggeration, is a form of *transposition*. Degradation is brought about when language repeats itself to transpose an idea from one key to another. It therefore follows the basic Bergsonian idea of mechanicity which attaches itself to the living idea by repeating it in a degraded form.⁵² To illustrate degradation as a historical problem, Baudelaire evokes Virginie—the principal character in Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s novel *Paul et Virginie* written on the eve of the French Revolution criticizing the moral corruption and inequality of eighteenth-century French society under the ancient regime. Virginie comes from a primordial utopic society which knows no class division, no violence, and no repression. Baudelaire invites us to imagine Virginie, who represents the natural utopia of a primordial society, in the midst of the squalor of nineteenth-century Paris. She is looking with absolute confusion at a

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵² Bergson, *Laughter*, 61.

caricature—probably of Gavarni.⁵³ Baudelaire argues that this pure and simple soul uncorrupted by the modern city, who is still “gilded by the tropical sun,”⁵⁴ will not only *not* understand and therefore fail to laugh at the caricature: she would feel scared. But eventually she will begin to laugh. Baudelaire writes, “the angel has sensed that there is something shocking here.”⁵⁵ Fear would be her immediate response which, with time, would probably change into laughter. But why this transition from anxiety to laughter?

It seems there is something overwhelming about the caricature for Virginie whose consciousness still belongs to the pure and abstract domain of nature. I suggest that what overwhelms her, causing a sudden rush of panic, is a sense of fall from nature into human society. However, it seems to me that it is not so much the sudden degradation of an uncorrupted consciousness as a sudden feeling of void, a feeling of groundlessness which is the source of her anxiety before nature could provide her with any ground for the generation of meaning. But once she confronts the caricature it hollows out this grounding, which was previously provided by nature. Virginie loses the very foundation of her freedom. Now there is nothing that guarantees that freedom. But she is yet to figure out that groundlessness is the very basis of her freedom, that freedom no longer requires a foundation but itself has become foundational. In other words, her anxiety is the expression of being overwhelmed by a groundless anarchic freedom devoid of natural meaning. Laughter is the point when this anxiety is replaced with enjoyment because she develops the comic intelligence, the self-consciousness of her alienated existence which is also the source of her freedom. Comic intelligence in Baudelaire is the privileged position of self-consciousness of nature which has become aware of its alienation. But it is nature’s alienation not from another order but from itself. This self-alienated nature is the source of meaning in modernity because it is identical with historical consciousness. It is not historical consciousness which is separate from natural consciousness. It is historical consciousness which is inscribed onto natural consciousness as its other. The profane order of history with its dualism of superiority/inferiority is what is inaugurated at the moment of the fall when nature and history become indistinguishable from each other. This is what Baudelaire defines as “diabolic.” Evil is this non-distinguishable element that haunts human progress. Thus, he writes that “the angelic element and the diabolical element operate in parallel. Humanity works its way up and

⁵³ Gavarni was the pseudonym of Sulpice-Guillaume Chevalier (1804–66), see footnote 4 of “The Salon of 1946” in Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 440.

⁵⁴ Baudelaire, “Essence of Laughter,” 144.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

acquires a potential for evil and an understanding of evil, proportionate to the potential for good.”⁵⁶ This is why civilizations cannot understand caricature for whom nature remains abstractly pure and untouched by the self-consciousness of its own alienation which coincides with the consciousness of its anarchic freedom.

Comic degradation is marked by the disintegration of all artistic auras. In a little-known prose piece titled “Loss of Halo” brought to our attention by Benjamin, Baudelaire talks about losing his artistic halo and finally being free to laugh at those artists who still possess such an aura.⁵⁷ The anonymous superiority of Baudelaire, the poet, who is indiscernible from Baudelaire the “ordinary mortal,” is not merely marked by degradation but by the destruction of this auratic presence of the artist. “Besides, dignity bores me,”⁵⁸ Baudelaire would say. And this loss of aura is the source of his laughter. Benjamin explores this willful disintegration of the aura in Baudelaire the artist by proposing a theory of desire effectuated by the gaze. Benjamin argues that aura is that distance woven into a work of art which has been loved and admired through the ages and has procured an inexhaustible potential which it exudes.⁵⁹ This inexhaustibility is captured within the distance which the artwork projects back onto the audience. It is like the return of the gaze by the artwork—its ability to look back at us when we look at it. What is captured in this gaze is the unquenchable desire which the artwork retrieves from the depths of time. When we desire beauty, when we look at an artwork with expecting eyes, the work looks back at us with the timeless desire captured in the “unique apparition of a distance.”⁶⁰ This is the auratic experience which Baudelaire, according to Benjamin, wants to deny his audience. Baudelaire erases the reciprocity of the desire which the gaze of the human eye evokes in the artwork. And it is precisely at this moment that a particular type of enjoyment—what Benjamin calls “charm”—is produced despite the “mirror-like blankness”⁶¹ projected by the artwork devoid of any distance.

Is this not exactly what comic enjoyment entails? Comedy showcases an enjoyment which is always in excess, and which frequently comes at the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁷ Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 209.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,” in *Selected Writings*, 3: 1935–1938, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 105.

⁶¹ Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 206.

cost of desire.⁶² The charm of the “decline of aura”⁶³ is captured in eyes that are completely self-referential and knows nothing of the auratic distance of the other. It is a gaze informed by a restless dullness, a self-protective gaze of some “beast of prey” which Baudelaire describes while talking of the prostitutes depicted by Constantin Guys.⁶⁴ This disintegration of the aura is perfectly captured at the moment when Virginie looks at the caricature but understands nothing. As Baudelaire remarks, “she is looking at the unknown.”⁶⁵ Virginie whose expectant gaze is not returned by the caricature because it knows only the profane and degraded power of history: it is oblivious of that inexhaustible promise of temporal fulfilment. As Benjamin notes, “what makes our delight in the beautiful unquenchable is the image of the primeval world”⁶⁶—a world Virginie descends from and expects to find while gazing upon the Gavarni caricature. But it is a desire which is denied and, in its place, comes the anxiety of being overwhelmed by looking into the abyss of the unknown. However, when this “nothing” is captured by the comic form of the caricature, terror is replaced by the enjoyment of laughter. The “charm” of the caricature is something akin to what Benjamin calls the detachment of *sexus* from *eros*⁶⁷—an enjoyment in spite of desire. The caricature projects the charm of its “mirror-like blankness” onto Virginie who first receives it with fear which slowly transforms into comic enjoyment. This enjoyment is a product of disintegration: it is an embodiment of Virginie’s comic degradation.

To conclude this section, we must emphasize that what Baudelaire argues to be comic degradation—the “fall”—ought to be seen as the original split of a unified field, a doubling of an Edenic absolute space creating a sacred and a profane order.⁶⁸ Where previously there was only one domain,

⁶² For a detailed elaboration on how comic enjoyment functions as a dislocated autonomous factor which carries within it the lack of castration, see the excellent essential appendix on phallus in Zupančič, *Odd One In*, 181–199.

⁶³ Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 204.

⁶⁴ Baudelaire based his famous study of modernity in his essay on the French artist Constantin Guys (1805–1892). See Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁶⁵ Baudelaire, “Essence of Laughter,” 145.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” 203.

⁶⁷ Benjamin argues that unlike in Goethe’s poetry where love is sated by the experience of the aura, Baudelaire produces an irreconcilable gap—“to multiply the miles/That separate my arms from blue immensities”—which produces a strange opaque intensity of enjoyment cancelling all distance which Benjamin identifies as *sexus* while the auratic fulfilment of love through longing he calls *eros*. Clearly the reference seems to be Felix A. Theilhaber’s *Goethe: Sexus Und Eros*.

⁶⁸ Two understandings of the comic nature of the “fall” emerge from our discussion of Bergson and Baudelaire. For Bergson the fall would be an expression of absentmindedness, inelasticity and the mechanical inability to adapt to the flexibility, suppleness and elasticity of

now there are two: "Joy is a unity. Laughter is the expression of a double or contradictory feeling."⁶⁹ Much like the character Giglio Fava, in E.T.A. Hoffman's *Princess Brambilla*, which Baudelaire mentions a number of times in the essay, comic doubling brings together two antinomic elements not in two separate bodies but paradoxically conjoined as one body. Giglio Fava and his mortal adversary the Assyrian prince Cornelio Chiapperi—friend and enemy—are the same, yet not exactly. The abject power of comedy is something similar because it emanates from the antinomic presence of power which requires its opposite of wretchedness.⁷⁰

On the Threshold of Comic Intelligence: Heller, Bergson, Baudelaire

To return to our inaugural problem of a dialectic of experience which Benjamin expresses through his idea of *Erfahrung* (long experience) and *Erlebnis* (isolated experience) and the problem of comic intelligence reconstituted from Agnes Heller's work we can easily discern Bergson's position. Bergson sees the modern tension as a crisis which has to be overcome. Though he is intuitively aware of the paradox of freedom which informs the crisis, in his hastiness to escape it, he proposes a dualist model. He categorizes the technological imagination which conditions *Erlebnis* as rigid and mechanical against which he pitches the wholesome experience of a life—something similar to *Erfahrung*—which is elastic and fluid. This hierarchic dualism between two levels of reality becomes the product of the ideological fiction—an image of thought—of a new metaphysics of life. We have tried to retrace Bergson's comic intelligence to such a fiction where a new metaphysical ground of life and creativity is imagined to solve the paradox of freedom.

In contrast, Baudelaire develops, as we tried to illustrate, a paradoxical image of the anomie of modernity through his thesis on laughter. Baudelaire tried to trace the possibility of extracting something lasting (*Erfahrung*) out of that which is passing, which is immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) without creating a false dualism between them. Clearly this means

life that elicits laughter. For Bergson the "fall" is the comic *effect* of an already existing duality between mechanicity and life. But for Baudelaire the "fall" is always the comic *source* which opens up a duality in the world between sacred and profane. Laughter is produced not merely because there are contradictions in the world but because all contradictions can be traced back to an original displacement—the "fall."

⁶⁹ Baudelaire, "Essence of Laughter," 150.

⁷⁰ For Baudelaire, the archaic figure of the wretched power of modernity is the urban bourgeois. While talking of the caricatures of Honoré Daumier, he would describe this class as "so common place and so eccentric." See Baudelaire, "Some French Caricaturists," 221.

to work with the negative; long experience—modern representation of reality—will be hollowed out of its meaningful content complying with an empty heterogeneity. Such representation would express the empty meaning of modern life, *re-presenting the hollowness of all representation*. Comedy, for Baudelaire as well as Heller, presents and represents reality, simultaneously transforming it into a paradox. Conversely, immediate experience will allow itself to be meaningful when it shows the impossibility of producing meaning. This is the anarchic freedom of modernity: to produce meaning out of nothing and exercise the power gained out of its own destitution. Anarchic freedom and abject power embody the figure of the poet without an aura. If “the ground [of modernity] opens the abyss,”⁷¹ then Baudelaire—unlike Bergson who wants to imagine a new ground—stares right into it. Benjamin offered an inimitable and secret image of modernity in his writings on Baudelaire. He argued that if time were a photographer trying to take pictures of the essence of our profane reality, then those pictures would only be registered on negative plates. Baudelaire, he says, is one of those exceptionally rare creatures who might not be able to transform those pictures into positive images but he “alone is able to read the plates.”⁷² Perhaps Benjamin meant that Baudelaire had the courage of thought to stare into the darkness of the abyss of freedom and thereby bring its anarchic origin to light. Laughter, Baudelaire argues, reveals the power of modern wretchedness, what he calls “weakness delighting at weakness.”⁷³ For Baudelaire comic intelligence is indistinguishable from the artistic capacity to reveal this anarchy of power⁷⁴—this angelic monstrosity of modernity. Such intelligence is what gives him the courage to be conscious about the wretchedness of his vanity to look into the abyss of his own existence; therein rests the true anarchy of Baudelaire’s laughter.

⁷¹ Heller, “Three Logics of Modernity,” 141.

⁷² Walter Benjamin, “Baudelaire,” in *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 27–29.

⁷³ Baudelaire, “Essence of Laughter,” 146.

⁷⁴ What we are calling the “abject power of the comic” in Baudelaire—which in the final analysis is anarchic—is something similar to what Agamben calls “destituent power” (*potenzadestituente*). Like the consciousness of the antinomic relation between power which grounds law in anarchy can lead to a form of life which is no longer captured by the paradigm of exception—an anarchic form of life—so does the anarchic function of comedy lead to a new practice of destituent power in Baudelaire. For a short but important exposition of destituent power, see Giorgio Agamben, “From the State of Control to a Praxis of Destituent Power,” in *Critical Legal Thinking* (5 February 2014), <<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/02/05/theory-destituent-power>>.

*School of Liberal Studies, BML Munjal University
Gurgaon, India*

References

- Agamben, Giorgio, "From the State of Control to a Praxis of Destituent Power," in *Critical Legal Thinking* (5 February 2014), <<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/02/05/theory-destituent-power>>.
- _____, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- Baudelaire, Charles, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 2006).
- Benjamin, Walter, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, trans. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- _____, *Selected Writings*, 3: 1935–1938, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- _____, *Selected Writings*, 4: 1938–1940, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).
- _____, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998).
- Bergson, Henri, *Key Writings*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Ó Maoilearca (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
- _____, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesely Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Rockville: Arc Manor Publishers, 2008).
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Bergsonism*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 2002).
- Dolar, Mladen, "The Comic Mimesis," in *Critical Inquiry*, 43 (Winter 2017).
- Esposito, Roberto, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*, trans. by Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
- Han, Byung-Chul, *The Expulsion of the Other*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).
- Heller, Agnes, *Immortal Comedy: The Comic Phenomenon in Art, Literature and Life* (New York: Lexington Books, 2005).
- _____, "The Three Logics of Modernity and the Double Bind of the Modern Imagination," in *Thesis Eleven*, 81 (2005).
- Horkheimer, Max, "On Bergson's Metaphysics of Time," in *Radical Philosophy*, 131 (May/June 2005), <<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/on-bergsons-metaphysics-of-time>>.

Zupančič, Alenka, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (London: The MIT Press, 2008).

Democratizing Machiavelli? A Critique

Anthony Lawrence A. Borja

Abstract: Appropriating Machiavelli for a political camp is tempting, and appropriations by all sorts of political leanings have rendered his body of thought as contradictory at best. John McCormick, in two relatively recent works, tries to cut through this by portraying Machiavelli as a populist and a democrat. Despite his insights, McCormick tries to end the conversation with the hopes of making his appropriation of Machiavelli conclusive. In response, I take a Gadamerian hermeneutical approach towards him and Machiavelli in order to keep the conversation open by asking two questions: (1) What is the relationship between popular sovereignty and statecraft? (2) What is the relationship between class conflict and statecraft? I will illustrate that Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and *The History of Florence* do not contain any notion of popular sovereignty along populist or even democratic lines despite exposing the strengths and limitations of the People in relation to the life of the republic and to other sectors within it. Overall, democratizing Machiavelli casts aside his gift of being sensitive to the internal problems facing a democratic project—a sensitivity to the weaknesses of the People and the complexities of factional conflict beyond binary oppositions and in relation to statecraft.

Keywords: Gadamer, Machiavelli, democracy, politics

Approaching Machiavelli: Joining an Endless Debate?

As morbid as it sounds, the body of Machiavelli's legacy is now drawn, quartered, and sent to the different corners of the political realm. Its persistence, however, is founded on Machiavelli's time-tested status as an iconoclast, appropriated through the centuries for a myriad of political

projects. He had been considered a voice for humanists,¹ authoritarians,² democrats,³ republicans,⁴ plebeian populists,⁵ and socialists of varying colors.⁶ Aside from political projects, analyses of Machiavelli's works have had contradictory interpretations—at least seventeen interpretations as Isaiah Berlin notes.⁷ Machiavelli's portraits range from being a satirist, a patriot, a hard-nosed pragmatist, a cold and politically uncommitted technician, a revolutionary thinker, a bitterly frustrated closet utopian dreamer, a prescientific critic of metaphysics and religion, a teacher of evil rather than being simply amoral, and ultimately, a man of his age who is stuck between the birth of modern states and the decay of feudal systems. It will take entire volumes to review all these but for the current study,⁸ I will provide an analysis of Machiavelli's relationship with politics itself. Thus, despite these conflicting appropriations and interpretations, Machiavelli remains, as Louis Althusser argues, both gripping and elusive,⁹ an assessment that Berlin shares in his own reading of both Machiavelli and contemporary interpretations.

For Althusser and Berlin, Machiavelli presents questions that political thought could not escape from. On the one hand, Althusser sees

¹ See Robert Kocis, *Machiavelli Redeemed: Retrieving his Humanist Perspectives on Equality, Power, and Glory* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1998).

² See Joseph Femia, "Machiavelli and Italian Fascism," in *History of Political Thought*, 25 (2004).

³ See Boris Litvin, "Mapping Rule and Subversion: Perspective and the Democratic Turn in Machiavelli Scholarship," in *European Journal of Political Theory*, 18 (2019); Christopher Holman, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Democratic Innovation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); John McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); John McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli: Scandalous Books, Suspect Engagements, and the Virtue of Populist Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

⁴ See J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Marcia Colish, "The Idea of Liberty in Machiavelli," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32 (1971); Paul Rahe, ed., *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Vickie Sullivan, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁵ See Jeffrey Edward Green, *The Shadow of Unfairness: A Plebeian Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Yves Winter, "Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising," in *Political Theory*, 40 (2012); Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁶ See Miguel Abensour, *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. by Max Blechman and Martin Breaugh (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011) and Ross Speer, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci," in *Décalages*, 2 (2016).

⁷ See Isaiah Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas - Second Edition*, ed. by Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁸ See Giovanni Giorgini, "Five Hundred Years of Italian Scholarship on Machiavelli's Prince," in *The Review of Politics*, 75 (2013).

⁹ See Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 1999).

these questions as the question of beginnings (i.e., of establishing a state) and conjunctures (i.e., necessitated political practice in the context of change, unpredictability, and converging factors).¹⁰ On the other hand, Berlin sees the questions as real yet unresolved, and probably irresolvable contradictions between moral systems (e.g., private vs. public, pagan vs. Christian, etc.).¹¹ With these considerations, we cannot contain Machiavelli in a tight and single frame because he is the one who provided us with the defining characteristics of political modernity itself.¹² He is, as Harvey Mansfield puts it, our commander—the first who tried to walk through a path that veers away from the ancients.¹³

Despite these, his works remain vulnerable to appropriations for the sake of specific and conflicting political projects. Bluntly, it is quite easy to make Machiavelli say something on anything about politics, and the current compendium of popularizations through isolated quotes is a downright burden. Ultimately, this is because we can never know the whole and absolute truth behind Machiavelli's struggle with the effectual truth at the core of politics.¹⁴ As is true for all artifacts of the psyche being embedded in human history, we could neither perfectly reconstruct Machiavelli's thought. He is dead and incapable of clarifying the contradictions he left behind. Rather, we are left with the long shadow he casts over us. Should we build a dogma upon his works, or take advantage of the corrosive nature of the effectual truth he presents?¹⁵

For this essay, I place weight on the latter option. Hence, my task is neither to present a final reading of Machiavelli nor to use him, brazenly or subtly, as a mouthpiece for a specific political project. Rather, I will elaborate a portrayal of Machiavelli as a thinker who, in trying to intervene in the very thing he is trying to analyze, employed an approach that exposes nuances, complexities, and possibilities while deploying generalizations through comparison.¹⁶ In other words, I will analyze Machiavelli's works for politics

¹⁰ Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 33–52.

¹¹ Berlin, "Originality of Machiavelli," 50–54, 74–79.

¹² See Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

¹³ See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*, 1–70 and Harvey Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 109–122.

¹⁴ I am reluctant to utilize the term "politics" since Machiavelli referred to it differently from how we understand it now. To an extent, this is my first act of appropriating Machiavelli to our times by making him speak of politics as we understand it now after his contributions to our collective thought.

¹⁵ See Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. by Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 5–52.

in general—for its movements and complexities beyond any specific project.¹⁷ From this, can we conceive of a Machiavellian approach to both the analysis of politics and the pursuit of a political life? If so, is such an approach conducive to democratic politics as an assertion of and a struggle to realize popular sovereignty?

To address these, I am confronting the recent democratic turn in Machiavelli scholarship,¹⁸ specifically the recent works of John McCormick.¹⁹ However, I note that I will not provide an extensive assessment²⁰ since Catherine Zuckert already provides an insightful and scathing critique of McCormick and other radical democratic interpretations. She illustrates that they have bent the stick the other way by warping Machiavelli into a populist—an advocate of aggressive class conflict against elites.²¹ Zuckert illustrates that McCormick's work is guilty of selective reading that gravitates around the role of class conflict and the supposed orientation of the People (*popolo*) towards freedom vis-à-vis the repressive tendency of the nobility. Alongside this, McCormick downplays non-democratic or even anti-democratic ideas within Machiavelli's primary corpus of works.

Thus, my goal is to reassert an image of Machiavelli as one who problematized politics in a manner that both defies yet invites multiple and even contradictory appropriations for more specific political projects. In addition, I will illustrate that McCormick gives a narrow interpretation of Machiavelli in order to appropriate him for a specific democratic project. Consequently, his reductionism serves as an obstacle between us and Machiavelli's approach to politics itself. Thus, facilitating a conversation along Gadamerian lines²² that I will elaborate in the next section, I ask the following questions to both McCormick and Machiavelli: What is the relationship between popular sovereignty and statecraft? And what is the relationship between class conflict and statecraft?

¹⁷ As Harvey Mansfield illustrates, Machiavelli himself uses (i.e., adapts and integrates) the ancients and Christian doctrines to create a more general approach to politics itself as statecraft and power. See Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth*, 48–61.

¹⁸ Katherine Robiadek, "For the People: Deepening the Democratic Turn in Machiavelli Studies," in *Political Theory*, 49 (2021).

¹⁹ See McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*; McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*.

²⁰ Nevertheless, as the succeeding sections will show, I build upon the following critiques: Catherine Zuckert, "Machiavelli: Radical Democratic Political Theorist?," in *The Review of Politics*, 81 (2019); Max Morris, "The Wisdom of the People and the Elite: John McCormick and Leo Strauss on Machiavelli," in *Theoria*, 70 (2023); and Ryan Balot and Stephen Trochimchuk, "The Many and the Few: On Machiavelli's 'Democratic Moment'," in *The Review of Politics*, 74 (2012).

²¹ Zuckert, "Machiavelli: Radical Democratic Political Theorist?," 499–502.

²² See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

We can use these two questions to crack open McCormick's works by revisiting Machiavelli's understanding of class conflict and popular power vis-à-vis the formation and maintenance of a republic. Through this, we can place Machiavelli back into the flux of politics by preventing any attempt to democratize his works in absolute terms. Overall, my primary objective is to facilitate a conversation for the sake of our own understanding of key issues on politics, democracy, and popular power. It is unfortunate that this must be at the expense of McCormick's analysis because it was an attempt to close down the conversation in favor of democratic politics.²³ Thus, we are now left with the task to reopen the conversation on Machiavelli and politics by avoiding the pitfalls of McCormick's reading without an absolute dismissal of his insights. To this end, I also intend to confront McCormick's idea of a Machiavellian democracy by interrogating Machiavelli's supposed affiliation with populist and democratic politics.

The ensuing sections will flesh out the following premises that will frame this conversation. First, according to Gadamer, understanding involves the fusion of horizons through application while being driven by both the primacy of questions and openness and a recognition of traditions mediating our relationship with those from the past. Thus, if it appears that I am trying to provide a seemingly more authentic reading of Machiavelli, then it is due to placing him in a conversation with us instead of trying to democratize him or even render him as a mere mouthpiece. Second, factional relationship (i.e., conflict, cooperation, cooptation, etc.) rather than a binary opposition between the *popolo* and the *grandi* is the key challenge that statecraft must face, may it be for principalities or republics. This goes against any reading that reduces Machiavelli's analysis to that of class conflict as familiarized to us through populist and Marxist lenses. Lastly, populist democracy entails, not only anti-elitism, the moral superiority of the People and its empowerment, but more importantly, a claim to its sovereignty. This allows the current conversation to recognize the current body of works on popular identity and sovereignty whose own set of problems prevent any haphazard appeal to democratic politics.

²³ Now, am I providing a critique of McCormick or a reading of Machiavelli? I can say both since either objective requires the other. A critique of McCormick requires another reading of Machiavelli while the latter objective could not ignore the insights from attempts to democratize Machiavelli.

Through these premises, I argue that Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* (*Discourses*)²⁴ and *The History of Florence* (*Histories*)²⁵ do not contain any notion of popular sovereignty along populist or even democratic lines. Instead, these works expose the strengths and limitations of the People in relation to the life of the republic and the sectors within it. In turn, these insights from Machiavelli can defy or support McCormick's reading. However, given the extant literature on contemporary populism and its ambivalent relationship with democratic politics,²⁶ and the troubled relationship between liberal institutionalism and democratic politics,²⁷ Machiavelli's impact is better felt as an act of suspension. In other words, his works show that neither populism nor institutionalism are necessarily democratic, something already shared by contemporary political theory.

We cannot cast aside Machiavelli's sensitivity to the internal problems facing a democratic, or at least a populist project. His is an understanding of the weaknesses of the *popolo* and *volgo* (the people and the ordinary) and the complexities of factional conflict beyond binary oppositions and in relation to statecraft. The same logic applies if one reduces Machiavelli to either an elitist or a supporter of authoritarian rule, or even a proponent of rule through law and institutions. Bending the stick the other way, one can end up ignoring the weaknesses of individual leaders, authoritarian rule, and even laws and institutions. In other words, his works manifest a tendency to see both the underbelly and the shadows haunting political systems; shadows that can eventually overturn, corrupt, and destroy principalities and republics alike. Sensitivity to such problems and the paradoxically hackneyed yet thoroughly relevant "gray area" of politics is what Machiavelli had given to us as part of his legacy.

By pushing Machiavelli to the realm of ideology via the well-meaning route of normative theorizing, we can end up abandoning his pursuit of effectual truth as something that no religious or political doctrine can contain. By crystallizing Machiavelli into an ideologue rather than keeping him as a theorist—an agnostic activist and defender of principles who can very well doubt with the same intensity—we will end up underappreciating the complex contributions of his works and deeds. We can

²⁴ See Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. by Leslie Walker, ed. by Bernard Crick (London: Penguin, 1984).

²⁵ See Niccolò Machiavelli, "The History of Florence," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. by Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

²⁶ See Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," in *Government and Opposition*, 39 (2004); and Chantal Mouffe, *For A Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2019).

²⁷ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

end up in a utopian ditch instead of running with a complex and moving reality. The succeeding section elaborates on this through Gadamer's dialectical hermeneutics as a form of open-ended and question-driven approach to interpretation, history, and the transmission of meaning.

Between McCormick and Machiavelli: A Gadamerian Approach

At the risk of appearing as if I am taking a detour, I note that since I am facilitating a form of triadic conversation between us, Machiavelli, and McCormick, I could not spare readers from hermeneutics as a discipline concerned with the transmission of meaning. Nonetheless, without being burdensome with this massive sub-discipline, I will focus on the Gadamerian approach that I deem capable of helping us avoid a reductionist reading of Machiavelli and even McCormick himself.

Thus, based on a dialectical model for hermeneutics that I derive from Gadamer's key work *Truth and Method*, we can approach McCormick and Machiavelli without trying to derive a final reading of the latter. This is founded on the considerations drawn from Gadamer, foremost of which is that hermeneutics is the process of bringing out the tension between the present and the past as embodied by a text. This is achieved through a fusion of horizons by a historically effected consciousness (i.e., a consciousness that is made aware of its own limits and relationship with history). Though a noble endeavor as Gadamer recognizes,²⁸ empathy in historical analysis can only go as far as an incomplete reconstruction of the author's horizon. In other words, there is no point outside of history that we can place ourselves to judge a text and expose its supposed essence under completely objective terms. Keith Jenkins further emphasizes this in a later work on the philosophy of history, illustrating that the past could not be recovered absolutely due to the simple passage of both time and the myriad perspectives that confronted the past when it was still present. Thus, history remains incomplete—it is a growing part of a simultaneously growing whole that could not be comprehended in its totality.²⁹

Consequently, we are left with the task of aligning our interpretations with the movements of history. Hermeneutics thus becomes a matter of horizons and the fusion of horizons. For Gadamer, the notion of horizon allows us to recognize the finite determinacy of our thoughts and our engagement with the past. It is what we can see and think of vis-à-vis the past that we are also a part of and possible futures exposed by the passage of the present. This may sound mundane, but Gadamer elaborates on the nature of

²⁸ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 184–218.

²⁹ Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003), 6–24.

horizons and their fusion in such a way that we as interpreters can end up being more sensitive to the historicity of ourselves and of the objects we are analyzing. This fusion is, as Gadamer states, a condition wherein we “regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them.”³⁰

What constitutes such a sensitivity and what are its implications? I point to the dynamics of application and questioning in generating knowledge for the present, through both itself and its past.³¹ Understanding is application itself. It is not understanding a text before applying it to a concrete case. Rather, a text is understood in applying it, in trying to make sense of a concrete case through it. In relation to history, application brings the past under the light of present conditions (i.e., establishing the interpretation of a text upon the concrete substance of the present) in order to bridge temporal distance between a text and its interpreter. This allows the latter to see the inevitable yet meaningful tension between a historical object and the changing context wherein it must be understood (i.e., historically effected consciousness). In other words, the text, made within a different historical horizon, will never be completely aligned with the present even if applying it to the latter is necessary for interpretation. It is this tension that renders application as the core problem of hermeneutics for Gadamer.

Nonetheless, this tension is not a license for free interpretation. Gadamer states that “the meaning to be understood is concretized and fully realized only in interpretation, but the interpretive activity considers itself wholly bound by the meaning of the text.”³² Moreover, application entails that in reading a text, we become part of the meaning that we apprehend given that we read through our own horizons. We end up belonging to the text itself, as Gadamer puts it with our engagement always ending in open indeterminacy.³³

Concerning hermeneutics as a dialogue driven by the primacy of questions, Gadamer argues that interpretation always involves a question.³⁴ A text becomes subject to interpretation, not only by asking it questions but by allowing it to put a question on the interpreter. In other words, hermeneutics involves extracting questions from the text itself as a way of

³⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 382.

³¹ I must note that I am excluding the role of traditions from this essay since this involves a much larger review of the extant literature on Machiavelli and democratic politics. Nonetheless, I cannot avoid referring to earlier interpretations and for this reason, I am offering such references as my own limited attempt to be faithful to Gadamer’s approach. For more details on the nature and value of tradition, see *Ibid.*, 289–293 and 322–387.

³² *Ibid.*, 341.

³³ *Ibid.*, 349.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 370–387.

letting it speak for itself. But how can hermeneutics proceed through questions and questioning?

Gadamer emphasizes openness as a way to reveal the meaning/s within a text while giving due weight to the reality of indeterminacy—a manifestation of the aforementioned tension between the interpreter and the text. Openness is characteristic of an authentic dialogue because it is based on a sincere need to learn and understand the text. It is open because it does not preclude any answer. For this reason, it is something based on and driven by indeterminacy.

Moreover, these questions embody the respective horizons of the text and the interpreter. What we ask a text and what we think the text asks reflect the historical conditions wherein such questions are located. The text and we as interpreters are trying to make sense of our own conditions. While the text speaks to us through our application of it, we speak with the text through lenses formed by our own histories. Concerning this mutual questioning, Gadamer states that:

The voice that speaks to us from the past ... itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness. In order to answer the question put to us, we the interrogated must ourselves begin to ask questions. We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the traditionary text is the answer. But we will be unable to do so without going beyond the historical horizon it presents us. Reconstructing the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer itself takes place within a process of questioning through which we try to answer the question that the text asks us. A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that circumscribed the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners.³⁵

It seems that this approach fosters a cacophony of meaning. However, Gadamer illustrates that this is not a process bereft of any goal or center of gravity. In trying to interpret a text, our historically effected consciousness allows us to be a part of the life of the text itself. It is a dance between two processes. On one hand, we recognize, respond, and interpret

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 382.

previous readings of a text. On the other, we subject these and the text itself to the corrosive force of questions and the creative force of open dialogue.

Overall, Gadamer states that in an open dialogue between the text and the interpreter, what “emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours.”³⁶ We arrive at knowledge that transcends those involved, thus, bringing all parties and their partial ideas (i.e., their respective horizons) under a more comprehensive whole. This more comprehensive whole, in turn, serves as a base for future dialogues under changed conditions—a new fusion of new horizons.

From these points, I assert that it is in dialogue that Gadamer draws the line between a misreading and an authentic fusion of horizons, with the former referring to closing a discussion on a text at the expense of both the text’s complexity and the openness of present realities. Simply put, misreading is a forced closure while fusion of horizons facilitates the linking of the past with the movements of the present and the possibilities offered by the future. We will see how McCormick is guilty of misreading.

Applying the aforementioned considerations for the topic at hand requires a fusion of at least three horizons. First, we have Machiavelli’s horizon via the traditions bridging him to the present. He is a product of his time and the readings of his works are products of their respective historical contexts. McCormick’s horizon, upon which his reading of Machiavelli is based on, is characterized by frustrations over contemporary American politics. This is embodied by his recommendations for a Machiavellian democracy that seeks to bring back popular power via institutional reforms in the American political system. Contrary to McCormick, my horizon is based on both exposure to non-Western and non-American political issues tied with engagement with the two previous horizons. I note further that at the back of my head is the experience of Filipino politics that I deem as something resembling oligarchic and factional politics during Machiavelli’s time while sharing McCormick’s own frustrations over the dire conditions facing contemporary democratic politics. This schema is massive enough to extend beyond this essay and you can consider this as an invitation to add your own horizon to this conversation. Thus, Gadamer’s emphasis on the primacy of the question and the value of application can serve as both the driving force and a frame for both the current analysis and future inquiries.

To this end I ask the following: What is the relationship between popular sovereignty and statecraft? And what is the relationship between class conflict and statecraft? These are supposed to crack open McCormick’s attempt to close a dialogue between us and Machiavelli. And by asking these questions vis-à-vis matters of populist and democratic politics, we can try to

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 376.

make sense of our own political horizons. Moreover, these questions allow us to recognize the contemporary literature on populism as means to eventually apply Machiavelli and McCormick's reading on contemporary conditions—something that McCormick does by applying Machiavelli, primarily on the cases of American politics and more generally upon Western democracies, and something we can do for future inquiries on non-Western cases.

Machiavelli as a Populist Democrat?

McCormick argues that Machiavelli should be understood as a democrat because his works are fundamentally populist (i.e., citizen-empowering)³⁷ and anti-elitist. These are manifested in his endorsement of popular offices (i.e., tribunes), non-electoral modes of appointing and punishing public officials, and popular assemblies that can directly decide public policy. McCormick insists that through these, Machiavelli allows us to rethink the institutional and cultural foundations of political participation and accountability in popular government.³⁸

Underpinning this populist democratization of Machiavelli is the primacy of class conflict. For McCormick, the conflict between the *popolo* and the *grandi* lies at the center of Machiavelli's thought, rendering him as a sort of populist democrat by supposedly upholding popular power vis-à-vis the People's need for freedom and recognizing that class conflict can contribute to institution-building in favor of the *popolo* or People and at the expense of the *grandi* or elite.³⁹ This summarizes McCormick's attempt to cast Machiavelli as the father of a form of democracy in his movement from hermeneutics to normative theorizing; the latter for the sake of contemporary democracies and the issue of elite accountability.⁴⁰

At first, such an argument appears impressive given that it emphasizes an innovation in the face of incumbent liberal democratic systems burdened by the problems of political inequality and lack of elite accountability. In its strongest form, McCormick's reading provides us with a glimpse of Machiavelli's sensitivity to the power of ordinary citizens and their capacity to contribute to the development of a republic and the liberties in it. Contemporary critics of liberal democracy and advocates for

³⁷ I am using the term popular power moving forward in order to nail down McCormick's loose usage of the *popolo–grandi* dichotomy.

³⁸ McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 1–35.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, viii, 65–90 and McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*.

⁴⁰ McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 141–188.

participatory democracy echoes such observations⁴¹ and for this reason, we can see how McCormick's works traces the pedigree of these advocacies back to the old Florentine.

Despite these, there are two main problems with his works. On one hand, to say that Machiavelli endorsed popular power is both an overstatement and a simplification that ignores other issues that Machiavelli was more explicitly concerned about. On the other, McCormick's reduction of populism to popular power and anti-elitism is an injustice to recent advancements in populist literature, thus preventing a more nuanced and holistic conversation between Machiavelli's works and contemporary populism.

To elaborate, I will show that populism entails more than mere popular power and anti-elitism, and that the idea of a republic that Machiavelli explicitly anchored his work in is irreducible to popular government as McCormick wants to portray it. Moreover, Machiavelli's works provide a more nuanced and complicated picture of class conflict beyond the mere binary of people–nobility that McCormick highlights. As I will show later, Machiavelli was more concerned with managing factional and class politics rather than advocating for a popular government.

If one takes these into account, then Machiavelli appears less of a populist, and far less of a democrat and more of a student and acute analyst of power, statecraft, and politics. Consequently, McCormick's two major works can be construed as fragile and narrow bridges between contemporary scholarship on populism and democracy, and Machiavelli's own contributions to the study of politics. The succeeding sections elaborate on the considerations stated above.

Statecraft and Popular Sovereignty

What is the relationship between popular sovereignty and statecraft? A Gadamerian approach entails pinpointing key questions and concepts. In a fusion of horizons, concepts serve as a point of convergence between ourselves and the past while questions keep discussions open and aligned with the movements and complexities of reality. Hence, between Machiavelli, McCormick, and us, the first set of concepts that we must grapple with are populism, popular power, popular sovereignty, and democracy. We shall also turn to key questions on who the People is, what are the manifestations

⁴¹ See Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Green, *Shadow of Unfairness*.

of popular power and sovereignty, and what Machiavelli can say about democratization itself.

Machiavelli did not entertain populism itself as we understand it now despite recognizing popular leaders and representatives. Nonetheless, can we derive an understanding of populism from his works? To address this, I note some important points. First, McCormick construes populism as civic empowerment. He then equates this with a notion of a Machiavellian democracy by adding Machiavelli's anti-elitism into the picture. Second, the contemporary literature in populism gravitates towards the idea that populism "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."⁴² Lastly, between McCormick and contemporary works on populism, it appears that the latter refers more to popular empowerment at the expense of elites instead of populism itself, the latter referring to more extreme conditions, namely, Manichean politics (good vs. evil, pure vs. corrupt) and the primacy of popular will. In other words, McCormick's analysis is qualified, not only by contemporary works on populism but also by certain limits emanating from Machiavelli's own works.

For the latter point, Machiavelli's supposed commitment to popular government is at best mixed or contingent on the more general issues of a republic's stability and greatness. Even his definition of a republic involves the integration of three different forms of government (i.e., monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy),⁴³ and the balancing of factional and class interests through a dynamic relationship between personal leadership and institutions. Furthermore, if we consider the lifecycle of republics in the *Discourses*—its foundation, sustenance, collapse or reestablishment—popular government only takes a more important role in the preservation of a republic, especially the institutions securing liberty within it. Machiavelli was explicit in stating that while the foundation of a republic is better achieved by sole and absolute leadership,⁴⁴ its reestablishment as a response to degradation must also go back to its beginnings; that is, back to an absolute leader.⁴⁵ Simply put, even if we admit that popular government is important in sustaining or even expanding a republic, Machiavelli insisted that its foundation and reestablishment is for a monarchical form of government.

Given this, Machiavelli did consistently recognize the power of the People in shaping political affairs and institutions—this is beyond dispute.

⁴² Mudde, "Populist Zeitgeist," 543.

⁴³ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28–33.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 209–212.

The *popolo* is an effective political power that can influence the life of a state and the trajectory of its development. However, did Machiavelli posit a Manichean conflict between a “good” People and an “evil” elite? Did he entertain the possibility of popular power along populist or democratic lines? McCormick seems to think so, and his sentiment is anchored in Machiavelli’s argument that the People, unlike the nobility, only wants liberty despite their flaws, vulnerabilities, and corruptibility.⁴⁶

Machiavelli did make himself vulnerable to such interpretations because of his generalizations, especially with the psyche and nature of humans.⁴⁷ However, his more nuanced descriptions and analyses of political relations qualify such generalizations if one pays more attention to them. For one, his treatment of the Ciompi (wool-workers/carders) Revolt showed that while the People want equality, dignity, and liberty (i.e., freedom from oppression), they ended up relying on leaders while being preoccupied with short-term goals at the expense of long-term stability and order—an instance of voluntary disempowerment. In other words, despite recognizing the impact of popular will made manifest either through mobs or institutional arrangements, Machiavelli did not consider it as the supreme basis of a republic.

The next section fleshes these out through the issue of class conflict but for now, I note that Machiavelli’s works portrayed the People, in less than rosy terms by showing that their desire for liberty is not tantamount to a need for self-government. Even if we recognize and even highlight their constant antagonisms with the nobility, such is not tantamount to a rejection of elites. At most, Machiavelli noted that their political effectiveness is dependent on leadership because as a mob they contribute nothing to statecraft at least or end up being outright destructive at most. Simply put, their desire for equality, dignity, and liberty need not lead to democratic self-government, and if it does lead to institutional development, it is through the act of leaders.

One can only make this circle fit a square by employing reductionist definitions of populism and democracy, something that McCormick’s works have done with impunity. By trying to democratize Machiavelli, his works rely on a narrow reading of Machiavelli tied to an equally narrow conceptualization of populism. Consequently, any conversation between us and the works of Machiavelli and McCormick might end up in an ideological ditch if we fail to consider the complications that Machiavelli exposed alongside his assessments and generalizations. Two examples of such nuances are concerned with the identity of the People itself and the nature of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17–19, 44–51.

⁴⁷ See Markus Fischer, “Machiavelli’s Political Psychology,” in *The Review of Politics*, 59 (1997).

conflicts that Machiavelli analyzed. The next section elaborates on these twin considerations.

Statecraft and Class Conflict

What is the relationship between class conflict and statecraft? From McCormick's works, the immediate answer to this is that popular power, manifesting itself through class conflict against a ruling elite, can lead to the establishment of new democratizing institutions. These, in turn, can contribute to the development and stability of a state. Alluring in its simplicity, this argument lies at the core of his reading of Machiavelli.

However, what People are we even talking about here? From the multitude, to plebs, to the People, Machiavelli, at first glance, used these interchangeably. Nonetheless, if we are sensitive to the context of his uses, then we can observe that these terms reflect the topics that Machiavelli were concerned with. For example, *popolo* is used not only in relation to the *grandi* but also in relation to a principality or a republic's expansion as *popoli* (i.e., conquering a people who is either used to servitude or to freedom). Another is *a moltitudine* (a multitude or the masses) that Machiavelli used in analyzing the nature of the masses and a prince.⁴⁸ Lastly, Machiavelli used *plebe* for his analyses of the Roman Republic, the relationship between wealth and power,⁴⁹ and the necessity of leadership for a non-*grandi* collective.⁵⁰

Without going into further details, I note that one could not simply brush away this nuance in the same sleight of hand that McCormick does. These different terms give us access to more general issues beyond class conflict (e.g., the necessity of leadership, the relationship of wealth, power, the republic, etc.). More importantly, this variety links Machiavelli to the contemporary literature on popular identity, peoplehood, and popular sovereignty—a literature driven by a debate on the determinacy of the People and the actual possibility and nature of its sovereignty.⁵¹

In his failure to give due consideration to contemporary works on both populism and the complexities of peoplehood and popular sovereignty,⁵² McCormick utilizes the concept of *popolo* in a very loose sense.

⁴⁸ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 108, 115–118.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 78–89.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114–115.

⁵¹ See Margaret Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); Hans Kelsen, *The Essence and Value of Democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers [1920] 2013); Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005); Paulina Ochoa Espejo, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and The Democratic State* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

⁵² See Anthony Lawrence A. Borja, "We, The People, Silent and Powerless: A Critique of Recent Pluralist Conceptualizations of the People," in *Philosophia: International Journal of*

Worse, he utilizes then attributes a simplistic understanding of class conflict to Machiavelli despite the latter presenting a more nuanced framework in the *Discourses* and *Histories*: a picture of class conflict that defies the simplicity of McCormick's *popolo* vs. *grandi*. Unsurprisingly, even McCormick himself concedes that the *Histories* shows more of a tripartite class system in Florence⁵³ before brushing this off as a result of Machiavelli's analysis of Florence's defective political system vis-à-vis the Roman Republic.

Such a concession, unfortunately limited as it is, points to the core problem of his reading of *Discourses* and *Histories*, namely, his assumption that Machiavelli's primary problematique is concerned with class conflict. The difference between McCormick and Machiavelli is that while the former insists on analyzing class conflict, Machiavelli explicitly stated in the prefaces of the *Discourses*⁵⁴ and the *Histories*⁵⁵ that his goals were to analyze the life cycle of a republic⁵⁶ and factionalism as the root of disorder and collapse, respectively.

As political units, factions can encompass different economic classes, thus serving as an appropriate concept in analyzing the relationship between partisanship and unity (factions being mere parts of the republic as a whole). Furthermore, contrary to McCormick, Machiavelli utilized the concept of factions to show that the Florentine class system is not dichotomous. Rather, there is also a complicated middle class constituted by entities like the various guilds of Florence. It is not, as we would say in political scientific terms, a mere independent variable affecting the life of state institutions.

Instead, class conflict is something that is interdependent with the relationship between government and factionalism,⁵⁷ the latter being irreducible to classes. From his analysis of the Ciompi Revolt to the general analytical thrust he presented in the introduction of the *Histories*, Machiavelli saw class conflict as but one dimension of the dynamics between factional conflict and statecraft. His comparison of the People of Ancient Rome and the People of Florence was not directed at the analysis of class conflict⁵⁸ but rather at the analysis of the relationship between conflict, resolution, and government vis-à-vis the problem of factionalism.

Philosophy, 24 (2023); Rogers Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵³ McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, 99–101.

⁵⁴ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 5–6, 209–212.

⁵⁵ Machiavelli, "History of Florence," 1029–1033.

⁵⁶ I refer to the foundation, maintenance, expansion, degradation, and reestablishment of a republic.

⁵⁷ Machiavelli, "History of Florence," 1145–1148.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1031, 1140–1141.

To illustrate, we shall reexamine chapters that McCormick draws from in the *Histories* as evidence for his claims about the superiority of the People despite Machiavelli's brief praise for the military prowess and generosity of the nobility.⁵⁹ These chapters are as follows: (1) Chapters II.39–42 concerning the 1343 Revolt and eventual ruin of the Florentine nobility; (2) Chapter II.14 showing the capacity of the People to compromise with the nobility; (3) Chapters III.12–15 regarding class conflict and the Ciompi Revolt. But instead of reading these from the lenses of class conflict, I will inspect them from the vantage point of factionalism and its impact on statecraft (i.e., in line with Machiavelli's explicit object of analysis in the *Histories*). I will also consider proximate chapters as means to elaborate on certain key observations.

We must note the following points. First, Machiavelli recognized other classes beyond the People and the nobility, namely, this middle class constituted by the wealthier members of the non-nobility (i.e., mercantile class). These classes, in turn, can form larger factions that can temporarily transcend economic differences. An example is the case of Andrea Strozzi's failed attempt to seize power in 1343. As a merchant, Strozzi was in a position to gain popular support by selling his grains cheap during a shortage. He did gain popular support, but it was neither stable nor substantial enough to resist the Florentine government's crackdown. In this chain of events, the contrary was true for the Medici and Rondinegli's successful armed intervention on the side of the lower classes.⁶⁰

We can also consider Machiavelli's treatment of the Ciompi Revolt as an illustration, not only of popular revolt affecting the government (something that McCormick repeatedly highlights) but also popular revolt being shaped by factional conflict among the ruling elites and the middle classes (i.e., the guilds). If one is tempted to conflate the middle classes with the People, then Machiavelli will show the case of Michele di Lando. Di Lando, lifted up by his fellow *ciompi* into a position of high leadership⁶¹ ended up being sandwiched between radical factions, his own moderate faction, and the Florentine guilds.⁶² Such an observation proves Machiavelli's sensitivity to complex class relations by recognizing both the asymmetric relationship among the guilds themselves,⁶³ and the impact of factional loyalties on class relations.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1136–1137.

⁶¹ The Gonfalonier of Justice (*Gonfaloniere di Giustizia*) is one of the primary executive offices in the Florentine Republic concerned with public order and internal security.

⁶² Machiavelli, "History of Florence," 1165–1175.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1158–1159.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1145–1177.

Another and a more definitive example is the speech in an assembly at San Piero Scheraggio by an unnamed citizen (a possible example of Machiavelli's creative license) who despaired over disunity and argued against the factionalism that took over after the fall of the Florentine nobility.⁶⁵ One can brush this off as a speech against new elites replacing an old one. However, given that disunity and partisanship were the targets of the speech rather than the nobility or the wealthy as was the case of the infamous speech of an anonymous woolworker during the eve of the Ciompi Revolt,⁶⁶ we must admit that the issues of factionalism and disunity holds, at the very least, an equal weight along with class conflict. Thus, even if we admit, that recognizing the wealthy non-nobility will not negate the *popolo-grandi* split that McCormick puts up, how Machiavelli analyzed this wealthy non-nobility points to the more general issues of factions, the fluidity of class lines, and the impact of factional conflicts on the life of a republic.

In relation to the latter point, Machiavelli portrayed the life of a republic as a struggle to maintain an integrated system constituted by representatives from all classes.⁶⁷ To illustrate, before the 1343 Revolt, Machiavelli noted that the Florentine government includes representatives from both the nobility and the People. After the uprising and reflective of the aforementioned nuance in the number of classes in Florence, Machiavelli noted that "the people reorganized the government, and because there were three sorts of people, the powerful, the average, and the lowly,"⁶⁸ the significant offices were distributed accordingly (i.e., more seats in the Signoria for the average and the lowly). The same is true for the aftermath of the Ciompi Revolt wherein the newly established government was based on a tenuous power sharing between the lower and higher guilds.⁶⁹

Through all these, for Machiavelli recognized that leadership plays a mediating role in the relationship between class or factional conflict and the life of a republic.⁷⁰ He illustrated this through positive (i.e., successful and contributing to the stability and/or greatness of a republic) and negative (i.e., failures in leadership that contributes to the corruption, instability, and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1145–1148.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1159–1161.

⁶⁷ For a more detailed account of Machiavelli's vision for a republic that integrates the lower, middle, and upper classes, see Niccolò Machiavelli, "A Discourse on Remodeling the Government of Florence," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. by Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

⁶⁸ Machiavelli, "History of Florence," 1138. I note Machiavelli's split of the People as a category in the original Italian quotation as follows: "riordinò il popolo lo stato; e perché gli era di tre sorte popolo, potente, mediocre e basso." Italics mine.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1168–1175.

⁷⁰ See Anthony Lawrence A. Borja, "Virtù, Fortuna, and Statecraft: A Dialectical Analysis of Machiavelli," in *Kritike*, 10 (June 2016).

collapse of a republic) cases. The key chapters that McCormick analyzes include not only Machiavelli's service to the Medici by citing their involvement in the success of the 1343 uprising but also the negative cases of the Archbishop of Florence and Andrea Strozzi. For the former, Machiavelli noted that the Archbishop's indecisiveness escalated conflict between the People and the nobility. For the latter, Strozzi's ambition and incapacity to gain sustained support from the People provided the nobility with a perceived opportunity to reverse an earlier redistribution of power and deprive the People of their political gains.

Machiavelli also recognized the capacity of the People to create leaders that they cannot control, a capacity embodied by the case of Michele de Lando who first rose up as the champion of the lower classes before turning against them for the sake of restoring peace and stability, and in favor of moderate and conservative factions constituted by members of the lower classes and the Florentine guilds. These cases show that for Machiavelli, the trajectory of class conflict and its relationship with factional conflict is mediated by the actions of leaders.

Most importantly, along with recognizing the impacts of leadership, Machiavelli also showed both the strengths and weaknesses of the People. I will extend the analysis of this point to the succeeding section but for now, as far as the *Histories* is concerned, the case of the 1343 popular uprising that castrated the Florentine nobility is sandwiched between two portraits of class conflict, one in relation to an uprising against the Duke of Athens who ruled over Florence⁷¹ and the other is a comparison between Rome and Florence.⁷² The former shows the inconsistent savagery of the People's vindictive rage when it murdered some of the Duke's supporters before losing steam and sparing others including the Duke himself. It also shows the possibility of cooperation between the nobility and the People when faced with a common enemy. The latter comparison between the ancient Roman and Florentine republics is marked by an argument on the relationship between class conflict and the life of a republic. Specifically, Machiavelli noted that conflicts between the People and nobility in Rome and Florence yielded varying results because "while the people of Rome wished to enjoy supreme honors along with the nobles; the people of Florence fought to be alone in the government, without any participation in it by the nobles."⁷³ This made the nobility more aggressive in defending their privileges, thus causing more chaos and destruction when the classes come to blows against each other in the streets of Florence. Machiavelli then proceeded to flesh out the results of

⁷¹ Machiavelli, "History of Florence," 1130–1133.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1140–1141.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1140.

such an imbalance and how it made itself manifest in the conflicts between the higher and lower classes of the People that emerged from the ruin of the nobility.⁷⁴

In relation to the last two points on leadership and the strengths and weaknesses of the People, an important caveat is that the strength of the People (i.e., popular power as the capacity of the non-nobility to influence public affairs) is shaped by leadership and need not contribute to the order, stability, and development of a republic. Moreover, Machiavelli explicitly stated in the *Discourses* that the wisdom of the People, as something that can be superior to that of a Prince, is based on a system of laws and institutions (i.e., a well-ordered people that commands).

Giving due consideration to these nuances while referring to contemporary understandings of populism, Machiavelli would appear as one who was more than a simplistic advocate of populist politics. Rather, he recognized the importance of laws, institutions, and leadership under specific conditions and for specific purposes. He also valued unity, order, and stability despite being both consistently anti-*grandi* and cognizant of the transformative value of conflict. In other words, Machiavelli granted neither the moral superiority of the People nor the primacy of popular will, despite recognizing their strengths, highlighting the corruption and limitations of elites and analyzing the gravity of class conflict. The next section fleshes these out by turning to the *Discourses*.

Machiavelli as a Democrat, a Populist, or Neither?

Is Machiavelli a populist or even a democrat? To reiterate, McCormick asserts that he is a populist and a democrat because of his anti-elitism, his supposed endorsement of civic empowerment, and his conversion of these two into institutional arrangements and developments that can enhance elite accountability. Simply put, there are three components to Machiavelli's alleged democratic leaning, and we will engage with these in turn.

Concerning Machiavelli's anti-elitism and supposed advocacy for civic empowerment, I note three nuances drawn from the *Discourses*. First, leadership is necessary for the effectiveness of popular power. Speaking of the People as a multitude, Machiavelli argued in Chapter I.57 of the *Discourses* that it needs a leader to keep it united and make it think more strategically. This is because despite being bold in criticizing decisions, a multitude breaks in the face of penalties due to distrust among themselves and their natural

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1141–1173.

tendency to think of their own safety as individuals.⁷⁵ Hence, Machiavelli stated that:

on one side there is nothing more formidable than an unshackled multitude without a head, and, on the other side, there is nothing weaker...For when the spirits of men are cooled a little and each sees he has to return to his home, they begin to doubt themselves and to think of their safety, either by taking flight or by coming to accord.⁷⁶

Furthermore, even Machiavelli's recommendation of making the People as the guardian of freedom in a republic hinges upon leaders as popular representatives. Specifically, popular power makes itself manifest, without endangering the republic itself through positions of leadership in the Roman government (e.g., tribunes, praetors, etc.).

Second, sole and absolute power is necessary in the establishment and reestablishment of a republic. In Chapters I.9–10⁷⁷ and III.1⁷⁸ of the *Discourses*, Machiavelli asserted that to face the challenges in establishing a new order or reestablishing/reforming an existing one—challenges ranging from external and internal threats to uncertainty and lack of support—power must be decisive, hence, undivided. Machiavelli's recommended roles for an absolute leader at both ends of a republic's life cycle was tied with his recommendation to give the maintenance of the republic to the many. I want to emphasize that these are based on his examination of a republic's corruption and decline through the machinations, conflict, greed, and shortsightedness of the nobility and the People.⁷⁹

Third, the capacity of the People to create leaders is due more to necessity and natural tendencies than a need to control those leaders. In other words, it is based more on the need for order, unity, and even compliance rather than empowerment and accountability. The latter is reflected more in their capacity to unmake leaders. We draw this line in order for us to ask about the relationship between the People, leaders, and leadership. Consequently, it appears that for Machiavelli, the People can lift a person to a position of leadership, not for them to control that leader but rather to rely on them. And if that leader ends up being unreliable, untrustworthy, incapable, etc., then the People can bring him down and replace him with

⁷⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 114–115.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 28–33.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 209–212.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 31–33, 44–54, 105–113.

another. These are two extreme forms of power founded upon, driven by, and could cause instabilities in a republic. Thus, where can we place the notion of accountability in these extremes if one could not hold a leader accountable if that leader is someone we either rely on without controlling or destroy without scruples? The answer, I think, lies in the power and necessity of laws and institutions that could and should transcend and bind all classes, sectors, and citizens in a republic.

To this end, Machiavelli gives much emphasis on the importance of laws and institutions. One clear example is that the People's supposed wisdom and constancy is due more to laws than to some natural tendency and that their empowerment must be tied to laws. Machiavelli states that "everyone who is not regulated by laws would make the same errors as the unshackled multitude" and good kings who are bound by laws must be compared "to a multitude regulated by laws as they are; and the same goodness that we see in them will be found to be in it [the multitude], and it will be seen neither to dominate proudly nor to serve humbly."⁸⁰ Overall, "for a people that commands and is well ordered will be stable, prudent, and grateful no otherwise than a prince, or better than a prince, even one esteemed wise."⁸¹

Fleshing this out, I note that the logic of Chapter I.58⁸² moves from an assertion that what the ancients accused the multitude of (i.e., vanity and lack of constancy) is something applicable to anyone unbound by laws towards arguing that the moderating effects of the law are necessary for the longevity of a republic. Machiavelli then raises two observations, namely, that the People, when regulated by laws can be wiser than a prince, and when they are unshackled by laws, they can be less dangerous than a prince—that their spirits can be calmed with more ease while their cruelty is triggered by perceived threats to the public good and contrary for princes and their fixation on self-interest.

Echoing this, Max Morris, in his mediation between Leo Strauss and McCormick, argues that while the latter emphasizes Machiavelli's insistence on the supposed wisdom of the People in order to cast him as a democrat, Strauss derives a different conclusion from the same premise that Machiavelli abandons a teleological view of human nature and the need for a philosophically determined standard for human perfection (i.e., an idealistic-utopian lens for politics).⁸³ Leo Strauss shows that as a teacher of evil, Machiavelli places the effectual truth of things at the center of his analysis,

⁸⁰ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 116.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 115–118.

⁸³ See Morris, "Wisdom of the People and the Elite."

rendering both republics and principalities—democracies and authoritarian regimes—as equally defensible systems depending on due considerations on moving circumstances (*fortuna*) and the quality of human action (*virtù*).⁸⁴

Though I agree with the considerations above, my critique of McCormick's reading is much simpler. Specifically, Machiavelli placed such wisdom and possible superiority over princes in the context of institutions (i.e., establishing a well-ordered system bound by laws). Unless we conflate institutions with democracies while ignoring Machiavelli's own analysis of (re)ordering (i.e., building and rebuilding institutions) through princely rule, then Machiavelli appears more of an institutionalist than a democrat.

Overall, being anti-elitist is not tantamount to being an advocate for civic empowerment (or a populist as McCormick insists). As contemporary definitions suggest, one must also hold that the People and its will must be morally and politically superior. This only works for Machiavelli if we assume that he held a clear-cut dichotomous understanding of class conflict. However, as the previous section shows, not only is Machiavelli's analysis of class conflict more nuanced and colorful, but his primary concern was with factionalism beyond classes and leadership in relation to both the republic and sectoral conflict. McCormick haphazardly shortcuts and disposes these considerations at our expense by appealing to Machiavelli's own broad generalizations on the case of Rome in the *Discourses* while framing the latter's extensive analysis of factionalism in the *Histories* as if it is about classes.

Even if we admit that Machiavelli did not turn conservative in the *Histories* as McCormick aptly asserts,⁸⁵ this does not make him into a populist or even a democrat. And even if we also admit that he was anti-elitist (excluding his emphasis on the role of leadership in the foundation and reestablishment of republics), the absence of the supposed primacy of popular will in his works prevents bending the stick the other way and turning him into a democrat of sorts. Now, if Machiavelli is neither populist nor democratic, then what could he be? The concluding section provides some insights on this matter.

Approaching Politics with Machiavelli

Other than the question about his identity as a way for us to appreciate him from a great historical distance, I also ask if there is a Machiavellian way of problematizing politics and its relationship with both

⁸⁴ See Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 174–298.

⁸⁵ See McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli*, 69–105.

structures and agency (individual and collective). These are the questions that I am leaving for future inquiries and even for attempts to appropriate him for a specific political project. And to keep these questions open, I propose the following considerations as a way for a conclusion.

First, McCormick's analysis in *Machiavellian Democracy* was limited from the start. His assertion about Machiavelli being essentially populist and democratic could not be derived effectively from his focus on elite accountability—a result of his own horizon that focused on contemporary challenges to Western liberal democracies—for the simple reason that the scope of Machiavelli's analysis is broader than the issue of accountability. McCormick's subsequent appeal to the effectual truth of politics, colored by his earlier assertions, is no more than an appeal to the effectual truth of populist and democratic politics—again too narrow for Machiavelli's concern with the very life of republics, principalities, and their various states.

In its strongest form, McCormick's readings successfully brought out Machiavelli's arguments on holding elites accountable and chained to the public good. Nonetheless, this is something that Jeffrey Green also accomplishes without even trying to argue that Machiavelli was essentially democratic.⁸⁶ I note further that Green, instead of insisting that Machiavelli is essentially democratic, adapts the latter's notorious recommendation for princes to learn *how not to be good* into a weapon that ordinary citizens can use to disempower the wealthy and powerful few. Such an approach is way more aligned to Gadamer's understanding of truth.

Second, if we are to speak of expanding our horizons on this matter, then Machiavelli's legacy must be extended to non-Western cases, especially those who are still dancing between democratization and authoritarianism—cases wherein class conflict is intertwined with factionalism and dynastic politics that Machiavelli himself might have considered familiar. Briefly turning to the Philippines as an illustration, recent attempts in political science have already been made.⁸⁷ However, being based upon McCormick's works, such attempts ended up sharing the theoretical limitations of McCormick's reading. In political philosophy, other than my own effort to analyze Machiavelli in his own terms (i.e., the dynamics between *virtù* and

⁸⁶ Green, *Shadow of Unfairness*, 8–12, 101–124.

⁸⁷ See Aries A. Arugay and Dan Slater, "Polarization without Poles: Machiavellian Conflicts and the Philippines' Lost Decade of Democracy, 2000–2010," in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681 (2019); Dan Slater and Aries A. Arugay, "Polarizing Figures: Executive Power and Institutional Conflict in Asian Democracies," in *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62 (2018).

fortuna) and from multiple levels of analysis,⁸⁸ Romualdo Abulad⁸⁹ sought to move beyond Machiavelli, and Rhoderick Abellanos and Regletto Imbong have rehabilitated him through more holistic readings.⁹⁰ Though I will no longer comment on their works in detail,⁹¹ I note that an appreciation of the centrality of effectual truth in Machiavelli's thought is necessary instead of simply relying on the usual appeal to Machiavelli's image as a proponent of *realpolitik*—an appeal that usually ends up reducing politics to mere power at all costs. For one, if we analyze the relationship of morality and politics from such a lens, then we can avoid issues of whether this or that political action is justifiably good or bad. Rather, we can consider the impact of morality as something mediated by the actions of the leader and the reactions of the ruled who are more likely to hold such moral standards closer to their hearts. I have done something similar in my previous work when I considered moral flexibility as a component of *virtù* and the morality of others as part of *fortuna*.⁹² I have yet to confront the issue of Machiavelli's effectual truth head on, and to this end we can ask: What is the effectual truth in the life cycle of contemporary republics torn between democratic, oligarchic, and autocratic forces and tendencies? What can we learn from Machiavelli regarding establishing republics upon such undemocratic and oligarchic foundations?

Lastly, in line with Mansfield's exposition of Machiavelli's politicization of *virtù*, I open the possibility of letting Machiavelli's treatment of private morality inform our understanding of depoliticization. If one defines depoliticization in its most basic form as a withdrawal of an object from politics—its conversion into a private matter—then from a Machiavellian perspective, we can see such a process as derailing political

⁸⁸ See Borja, "Virtù, Fortuna, and Statecraft."

⁸⁹ See Romualdo Abulad, "Philosophy and Politics: Do they Mix?," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 8 (2009); Romualdo Abulad, "Martial Law and Religion," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts*, 6 (2017); and Romualdo Abulad, "Filipino Postmodernity: Quo Vadis?," in *Kritike*, 13 (December 2019).

⁹⁰ See Rhoderick Abellanos, "Niccolo Machiavelli and the Possibility of the Post-political," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 18 (2019) and Regletto Imbong, "Abulad's Post-Machiavelli and His Apology for Duterte," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 18 (2019).

⁹¹ On one hand, we have Romualdo Abulad's efforts to break a supposedly Machiavellian/modernist paradigm that places power and the self at the center of politics while removing morality from the picture. On the other, and responding to Abulad's reading of Machiavelli, we have Regletto Imbong and Rhoderick Abellanos separate criticisms of Abulad's notion of post-Machiavelli. For the former, Abulad's anti-Machiavellianism was based on a one-sided image of the Florentine that sees Machiavelli as a mere proponent of tyranny and deceit. For the latter, sharing Imbong's concerns over Abulad's readings, analyzing Machiavelli through a more holistic approach allows a better appreciation of Machiavelli's take on ethics and the relationship between philosophy and politics. Considered together, I note that a better appreciation of Machiavelli's analytical approach is necessary.

⁹² See Borja, "Virtù, Fortuna, and Statecraft."

agents from the path of power. Future inquiries can then invoke critical theorists to elaborate on how such a disempowerment is partially driven by the alluring illusion of private power—the illusion of self-mastery and self-control in isolation from society and politics. A myriad of self-help books can attest to such, but this is one that I will leave for future inquiries.

In summary, by focusing on the effectual truth of politics, Machiavelli is giving us the keys to the wine cellars of history and politics. It is our choice whether to join him or end up getting sick with vinegar, reducing him to either a democrat or an autocrat.

*Department of Political Science and Development Studies
De La Salle University, The Philippines*

References

- Abellanos, Rhoderick, "Niccolo Machiavelli and the Possibility of the Post-political," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 18 (2019).
- Abensour, Miguel, *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. by Max Blechman and Martin Breugh (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
- Abulad, Romualdo, "Filipino Postmodernity: Quo Vadis?," in *Kritike*, 13 (December 2019).
- _____, "Martial Law and Religion," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts*, 6 (2017).
- _____, "Philosophy and Politics: Do they Mix?," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 8 (2009).
- Althusser, Louis, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 1999).
- Arugay, Aries and Dan Slater, "Polarization without Poles: Machiavellian Conflicts and the Philippines' Lost Decade of Democracy, 2000–2010," in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681 (2019).
- Balot, Ryan and Stephen Trochimchuk, "The Many and the Few: On Machiavelli's 'Democratic Moment'," in *The Review of Politics*, 74 (2012).
- Barber, Benjamin, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- Berlin, Isaiah, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas - Second Edition*, ed. by Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- Borja, Anthony Lawrence A., "Virtù, Fortuna, and Statecraft: A Dialectical Analysis of Machiavelli," in *Kritike*, 10 (June 2016).

- _____, "We, the People, Silent and Powerless: A Critique of Recent Pluralist Conceptualizations of the People," in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 24 (2023).
- Canovan, Margaret, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).
- Colish, Marcia, "The Idea of Liberty in Machiavelli," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32 (1971).
- Femia, Joseph, "Machiavelli and Italian Fascism," in *History of Political Thought*, 25 (2004).
- Fischer, Markus, "Machiavelli's Political Psychology," in *The Review of Politics*, 59 (1997).
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
- Giorgini, Giovanni, "Five Hundred Years of Italian Scholarship on Machiavelli's Prince," in *The Review of Politics*, 75 (2013).
- Green, Jeffrey Edward, *The Shadow of Unfairness: A Plebeian Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- Holman, Christopher, *Machiavelli and the Politics of Democratic Innovation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).
- Imbong, Regletto, "Abulad's Post-Machiavelli and His Apology for Duterte," in *PHAVISMINDA Journal*, 18 (2019).
- Jenkins, Keith, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- Kelsen, Hans, *The Essence and Value of democracy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, [1920] 2013).
- Kocis, Robert, *Machiavelli Redeemed: Retrieving his Humanist Perspectives on Equality, Power, and Glory* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1998).
- Laclau, Ernesto, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).
- Litvin, Boris, "Mapping Rule and Subversion: Perspective and the Democratic Turn in Machiavelli Scholarship," in *European Journal of Political Theory*, 18 (2019).
- Niccolò Machiavelli, "A Discourse on Remodeling the Government of Florence," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. by Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).
- _____, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- _____, *The Discourses*, trans. by Leslie Walker, ed. by Bernard Crick (London: Penguin, 1984).
- _____, "The History of Florence," in *Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others*, trans. by Allan Gilbert (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).
- Mansfield, Harvey, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

- _____, *Machiavelli's Effectual Truth: Creating the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- McCormick, John, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- _____, *Reading Machiavelli: Scandalous Books, Suspect Engagements, and the Virtue of Populist Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Moffitt, Benjamin, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).
- Mouffe, Chantal, *For A Left Populism* (London: Verso, 2019).
- _____, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).
- Mudde, Cas, "The Populist Zeitgeist," in *Government and Opposition*, 39 (2004).
- Morris, Max, "The Wisdom of the People and the Elite: John McCormick and Leo Strauss on Machiavelli," in *Theoria*, 70 (2023).
- Ochoa Espejo, Paulina, *The Time of Popular Sovereignty: Process and The Democratic State* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).
- Pateman, Carole, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- Pocock, John G.A., *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).
- Rahe, Paul, ed., *Machiavelli's Liberal Republican Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Ricoeur, Paul, *History and Truth*, trans. by Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).
- Robiadek, Katherine, "For the People: Deepening the Democratic Turn in Machiavelli Studies," in *Political Theory*, 49 (2021).
- Slater, Dan and Aries A. Arugay, "Polarizing Figures: Executive Power and Institutional Conflict in Asian Democracies," in *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62 (2018).
- Smith, Rogers, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Speer, Ross, "The Machiavellian Marxism of Althusser and Gramsci," in *Décalages*, 2 (2016).
- Strauss, Leo, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- Sullivan, Vickie, *Machiavelli, Hobbes, and the Formation of a Liberal Republicanism in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- Winter, Yves, "Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising," in *Political Theory*, 40 (2012).

_____, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

_____, "Machiavelli: Radical Democratic Political Theorist?," in *The Review of Politics*, 81 (2019).

Article

Revisiting Giorgio Agamben's Reformulation of Michel Foucault's Biopolitics¹

Daryl Y. Mendoza

Abstract: Michel Foucault's twin notions of biopolitics and biopower were pivotal in the development of a theoretical tradition in the social sciences and the humanities, despite riddled with conceptual inconsistencies and culminating in ambivalence. Giorgio Agamben later claimed to have continued and completed Foucault's unfinished project and appropriated this continuity to analyze the configurations of power today. In this paper, I revisit the Foucault-Agamben relation. I claim that Agamben's conception of power, subsumed in his biopolitics, is a continuation and completion of Foucault's biopolitics despite the differences. In a peculiar way, Agamben's biopolitics is a unifying account of power that brings together what Foucault's biopolitical investigations, partitioned in different moments in his investigations, are unable to connect. The task of this paper is three-fold. First, I articulate a succinct narrative account of Foucault's biopolitics. Second, I locate Agamben's point of departure from Foucault and discuss his own notion of biopolitics. In doing this, I chart their divergences and convergences. Third, I articulate Agamben's reformulation of Foucault's biopolitics as a way of understanding how Agamben's biopolitics can account for the originary and fundamental structure of both fascism and liberal democracies, which is one power—biopower—in two modes—centralized and dispersed.

Keywords: Agamben, Foucault, biopolitics, biopower

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 46th Philosophical Association of Visayas and Mindanao (PHAVISMINDA) International Conference, Phavisminda Conference in Eastern State University – Ormoc Campus, Ormoc City, Philippines, September 27–29, 2024. The theme of the conference was "Aquinas and Foucault: At the Crossroads of Medieval and Contemporary Philosophy. Their call for papers can be accessed through their official social media page. PHAVISMINDA, "46th Phavisminda International Conference: Rationale" (7 June 2024), <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=802320675358764&set=pcb.7656134544472362>>

Introduction: The Foucault-Agamben Relation

In one of the earliest introductions to Giorgio Agamben's philosophy in English, Leland de la Durantaye remarks that Foucault is "the single most decisive influence on Agamben's later works, a fact on clear display not only in the *Homo Sacer* series but also in such works as *Signatura rerum*."² Written in 2008, five years before the publication of the last book of the *Homo Sacer* series,³ Durantaye's comment may sound initially premature to mark these mentioned works as Agamben's "later works"; he is nonetheless correct to highlight and thematize the profound influence of Foucault's thought to Agamben's philosophy. In the first and eponymous work of what turns out to be a nine-book series, Agamben primarily cites Aristotle's division of life, Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, and Foucault's biopolitics as points of departure for his project. Particularly crucial is his correction "or, at least," completion of Foucault's thesis⁴ on biopolitics that decisively shapes his own conception of biopolitics.⁵ Also, going beyond the biopolitical aspect of Foucault's influence, Agamben himself confesses in a reflection of his own philosophical method that Foucault is "a scholar from whom I have learned a great deal in recent years."⁶

Despite these considerations and Agamben's own words, there are discussions that debate the extent of Agamben's biopolitics as a continuity or a completion of Foucault's biopolitics. From the backdrop of Agamben's claim that his biopolitics is a continuity or completion of Foucault's, both Mika Ojakangas and Paul Patton⁷ accentuate their discontinuity in the

² Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 208.

³ The last book of the *Homo Sacer* series is first published in Italian in 2014 with the title *L'uso dei corpi*. For the English edition see Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, "Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life," trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen in *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 11.

⁵ Although Agamben does not rely only on Foucault as his "primary interlocutor," to borrow the terms of Carlo Salzani and Adam Kotsko's edited work, "Agamben's Philosophical Lineage," Foucault is profoundly important in Agamben's (bio)political phase, because he does not only take Foucault's conception of biopolitics as one of his springboards, but the twist and turns in Foucault's own discourse on biopower and biopolitics is, as I show here, followed through and reformulated by Agamben's biopolitics to the point that despite the divergences in their conception, a subtle thread of continuity in their biopolitical project remains.

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 7.

⁷ Mika Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault," in *Foucault Studies* 2, (2005), 5–28; Paul Patton, "Agamben and Foucault on Biopower and Biopolitics," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 203–218.

conception of the biopolitical. Ojakangas highlights how the historical development of Foucault's biopolitics is informed by Christian love and its subsequent demand for care that defines pastoral power and which, with the emergence of newer forms of technologies and its subsequent transformation of power-relation, is the precursor to biopolitics. In Ojakangas's reading, love and care are the hidden threads that sustain Foucault's biopolitics, which would have its own peculiar conclusions in contrast to Agamben's.⁸ This is because, for Agamben, the actual and potential violence of sovereign power over life founds biopolitics, not love nor care. Its protagonist, *Homo Sacer*, "who may be killed but not sacrificed,"⁹ serves as the model that illustrates the precarity of our lives in contemporary times. But what makes Agamben's position reliant on this violence, which, according to him, is "the original activity of sovereign power" that places biopolitics to be "at least as old as the sovereign exception,"¹⁰ makes his position vulnerable to the charge of "conceptual foundationalism" which Patton raises against his biopolitics.¹¹ Foucault's biopolitics, on the other hand, emerged as a product of historical development, while for Agamben, it is, according to Patton, determined by a concept that has its origin in the very beginning of Western politics and sustains Western politics up to this day. Taken from this perspective, Agamben's biopolitics borders a transhistorical function from Ancient Greece to Contemporary America. This is not the same with Foucault's biopolitics being contingently dependent upon historical tensions with emergent *technai* and circumstances that configure the power-relation dynamics. The difference, Patton concludes his assessment between Agamben's and Foucault's biopolitics, is and I quote: "not so much a matter of correction and completion as a choice between epochal concepts of biopolitics and bare life and a more fine-grained, contextual and historical analysis intended to enable specific and local forms of escape from the past."¹²

Although we can agree with some points in the assessments of Ojakangas and Patton on the divergence of Agamben's biopolitics to Foucault, there is a missing point in their analysis that, although not within their fault, needs consideration. Written before the completion of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series in 2014, their evaluations were limited only to the early books of the project. Their articles crucially missed out on the interesting turn

⁸ Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue," 19–20.

⁹ Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Patton, "Agamben and Foucault," 218. Quoting Patton, conceptual foundationalism is "the meaning of concepts is irrevocably determined by their origin." *Ibid.* Thus, with this charge, it is not difficult to imagine Agamben's position as appealing to a universalism which can be contradicting to his Foucauldian inspired archaeological method.

¹² *Ibid.*

within the series, most particularly with the publication of Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory*, first published in Italian in 2007.¹³ It is to the credit of Jeffrey Bussolini to partially fill this lacuna. He revisits the Foucault-Agamben relation in his 2010 critical review, "Critical Encounter between Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault,"¹⁴ and reiterates that Agamben's intellectual itinerary is "heavily indebted to Foucault."¹⁵ Whereas both Ojakangas and Patton reacted against Agamben's claim for continuity or completion, Bussolini reinvigorates Agamben's admission of indebtedness by explicating the general points of Agamben's three works,¹⁶ which both Okajangas's 2005 essay and Patton's 2007 article were not able to consider. What lies at the core of Bussolini's critical review, without having to repeat his summaries, is the principal claim for continuity between Foucault and Agamben. Like Agamben's teacher, Heidegger, who reads philosophers such as Nietzsche to produce Heidegger's own Nietzsche in two volumes, Agamben takes Foucault in such a way that he reads through Foucault's works and appropriates "the philosophical interpretation of certain concepts and passages."¹⁷ To be sure, there are differences between Foucault and Agamben, which goes to show that the points raised by Ojakangas and Patton are valid, but the continuity that Bussolini emphasizes is marked by a similar trajectory of thought between Foucault and Agamben but read in a new registry. This allows for the possibility to conceive or read of Agamben's continuity of Foucault's biopolitics as, among others, ontological, a persuasion to which we can confidently state that Foucault does not subscribe.¹⁸

Situated within the terrain of the Foucault-Agamben relation, the general aim of this paper is to trace the development of Agamben's biopolitics to Foucault's. Although I do not reject that there are differences between their conceptions as pointed out by some scholars such as those earlier mentioned, I, however, align myself to read their relation in a peculiar way that highlights

¹³ Its English edition is published as *The Kingdom and the Glory: For A Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. by Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Jeffrey Bussolini, "Critical Encounter Between Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault," in *Foucault Studies* 10 (2010), 108–143.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁶ Using the English editions, which, except for "The Signature of All Things," were not yet available in the time of Bussolini's writing, these works are *The Kingdom and the Glory*, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), and *The Signature of All Things*.

¹⁷ Bussolini, "Critical Encounter," 108.

¹⁸ For instance, Matthew Abbott reads Agamben's biopolitics as resolutely ontological. See Matthew Abbott, *The Figure of this World: Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

their continuity in generally the same sense which I describe the aim of Bussolini's critical review. Unlike Bussolini, however, I take as key to my reading a unitary account of power, which was initially articulated by Agamben in *Homo Sacer* but finds its other half in *The Kingdom and Glory*.

The claim that I make in this paper is that Agamben's conception of power, subsumed in his biopolitics, is a continuation and completion of Foucault's biopolitics despite the differences. In a peculiar way, Agamben's biopolitics is a unifying account of power that brings together what Foucault's biopolitical investigations are unable to connect. That is, Foucault's biopolitics, partitioned in different moments in his investigations—from seeing biopower and biopolitics as a continuation of disciplinary power, management of populations, to the art of government or governmentality that informs his notion of liberalism, which defines contemporary democracies—are taken as different modes of one and the same thing in Agamben's conception of biopolitics. Thus, power as sovereignty and governmentality, fascism and democracy, authoritarianism and liberalism, with all their calculations and measures, surveillance and practices, legislation and enactments, are in Agamben merely different modes of biopolitics. This is the “inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism.” However, how these “two faces of power converge remains strangely unclear in Foucault's work, so much so that has been claimed that Foucault would have consistently refused to elaborate a unitary theory of power.”¹⁹

To achieve the aim and demonstrate my claim, the task of this paper is divided into three parts. First, I articulate a succinct narrative account of Foucault's biopolitics. Second, I locate Agamben's point of departure from Foucault and discuss his own notion of biopolitics. In doing this, I chart their divergences and convergences. Third, I articulate Agamben's reformulation of Foucault's biopolitics as a way of understanding how biopolitics can account for the originary and fundamental structure of both fascism and liberal democracies, which is one power—biopower—in two modes—centralized and dispersed. That they are not so different can bring to light the contemporary political configurations in which democracies today can act fascist or how authoritarianism is possible through democracies.

In Aristotelian tonality, there are many ways in which “biopolitics” is said to be. Thus, at the onset, it is crucial that we do not take this term and concept as having a univocal meaning. As context, the concept of biopolitics, and my use of it here, requires a preliminary clarification. By biopolitics, I am specifically referring to the tradition that Foucault inaugurated, and which was a subject of his later lectures at the College de France beginning in 1976.

¹⁹ Agamben, “*Homo Sacer*,” 12, 8.

Although it has been argued that he never fully developed this concept,²⁰ his conception initiated a tradition in the social sciences and the humanities, particularly in continental philosophy. His concepts of biopolitics and biopower serve as decisive marks in the discourse that distinguishes the biopolitics that came before him, those that developed separately from his lectures, and those that take him as their point of departure.

Biopolitics, therefore, is neither coined nor first conceptualized by Foucault. Already in 1911, the term was employed, if not coined, by G.W. Harris to refer to "a policy which should consider two aspects of the nation: in the first place, the increase of population and competition; in the second place, the individual attributes of the men who are available for filling places of responsibility in the State."²¹ Since then, other theorists have also broadly employed the concept to refer to the relation between politics and biology. For instance, six years later, the political theorist Robert Kjellen, who coined the term "geopolitics," also used the term to understand the state as having the structure and processes of an organism. These conceptions of biopolitics are not my concern.²²

However, two clarifications must be made within the Foucauldian tradition. First, the conception of biopolitics is problematized within Foucault as having either a unified account or merely fragments of lectures. Second, what constitutes this tradition of biopolitics is the differing accounts of several thinkers who deal with biopolitics and take Foucault's as their point of departure but develop their own diverging accounts to reach peculiar conclusions.²³

With this preliminary clarification, the equivocality of biopolitics should already be clear and given attention. It is the biopolitics of Foucault and the tradition that developed from his notion that concerns this paper. I

²⁰ Although Foucault mentions biopower and biopolitics in his later lectures, he never really developed a fuller account in comparison to his earlier works, such as for instance, on disciplinary power. As Patton argues that "the concept of biopower does not play a major role in Foucault's work." A reason for this, he argues, is that "it may have been problems internal to the concept of biopolitics itself that have prevented its further development." Patton, "Agamben and Foucault," 206. This is later reechoed by Catherine Mills. She writes "the place that the notion of biopower occupies in Foucault's oeuvre is itself ambivalent in that it both draws upon earlier threads and turns them to new ends, one which, it is probably fair to say he never fully realized." Catherine Mills, *Biopolitics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 13.

²¹ G.W. Harris, "Bio-Politics" in *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art*, 10:9 (December 28, 1911), 197. Also see Mika Ojakangas, *On The Greek Origins of Biopolitics: A Reinterpretation of the History of Biopower* (London: Routledge, 2016), 11.

²² See Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. by Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 16.

²³ We can count, among others, some works of Roberto Esposito, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Achille Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben as belonging to this tradition.

am specifically focused on its reinvigoration and reformulation in the work of Agamben.

Foucault's Biopolitics: 1974–1979

Foucault's conception of biopolitics came relatively later in his intellectual career. Although his first usage of the term was in a lecture in 1974, "The Birth of Social Medicine," it was not until 1976 that an arguably more defined conception of biopolitics and biopower was made.

The two sources in 1976 are the last chapter on the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, "The Right of Death over the Power of Life," and the March 17, 1976's lecture at the College de France, which is posthumously gathered and published as the last chapter of *Society Must Be Defended*.²⁴ His conception of biopolitics is continued in his 1977–1978 lectures that touch on pastoral power and the science of the police in "Security, Population, Territory," and his 1978–1979 lectures on Governmentality and Liberalism in "The Birth of Biopolitics." Within his intellectual itinerary, biopower and the *technai* that spring it to existence, collectively known as biopolitics, can be seen as a development of his earlier preoccupation with providing a theory of power that departs from the classical and unitary "subject-to-subject cycle"²⁵ of sovereign power to account for the configurations of power in the present.

In the last chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault mentions an aspect of sovereign power traced back to Roman law, the *patria potestas*. This law places the father as having the right to the lives of his children, a "power of life and death." As this was at the level of the *oikos*, the sovereign holds a similar power at the level of the *polis*; that is, the sovereign's right to the lives of his subject, as suggested by the title of the chapter, "the right of death over the power of life," which Foucault reformulates as "the right to take life or let live."²⁶

However, the emergence of a new power-relation marks the dissipation of sovereign power and sees a shift in the focus of political calculations from the sovereign's "right to take life" to a more radical valence

²⁴ Respectively, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol.1, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 133–160; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975–1976*, trans. by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 239–264. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978–1979*, trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

²⁵ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 43.

²⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol.1, 136

of the power to "letting live." The power to let live complexifies to form techniques that "fosters life or disallowing it to the point of death."²⁷

In his investigations, Foucault noticed the gradual disappearance of public executions and torture in France at the beginning of the 19th century.²⁸ What this seemingly inconspicuous spot in history signifies, in the interpretation of Foucault, is the ascendancy of a new configuration of power-relation that sees how the ancient *pater potestas* exercised by the sovereign becomes gradually replaced by new dynamics that inaugurate the entrance of the individual body—the politicization of anatomy—into the equation of political calculation. From the spectacles of tortures and public executions since ancient times, which mark the condemned as the property of the sovereign and therefore subject to sovereign power, to the development of more humane punishments and generalized testing, which transform these subjects from properties of the king to properties of society, power's turn of focus is now on the individual body that has to be rendered as docile and, when necessary, appropriated for public works.²⁹ This is Foucault's disciplinary power. Its twin functions are suggested, respectively, in the title of the same work in which he expounds this theory, *Discipline and Punish*.

When it was mentioned earlier that the "power to foster life" complexifies and overcomes the "power to take life," a recourse to Foucault's disciplinary power is necessary for two reasons: first, in the logical and chronological development of Foucault's work, disciplinary power comes first; second, biopolitics is an extension of disciplinary power in a larger scope. The arrival of biopolitics as a paradigm of the present, which in Foucault's *oeuvres* comes after he theorizes disciplinary power, does not supersede disciplinary power. Rather, the latter is subsumed and permeates into the former. If disciplinary power puts the individual human body as a central element in its contrivances to produce docile bodies and establish the norm, biopolitics then places not the individual body within its calculations but entire populations, the body *en masse*.³⁰

Thus, it should not be surprising that Foucault's biopolitics was included in the last part of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* because

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 14.

²⁹ For instance, see *Ibid.*, 109. Ultimately, the function of disciplinary power is to produce docile bodies which is achieved through "hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination." *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁰ Foucault writes, "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed... The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life." Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 139–140.

“sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so, it is a matter of discipline, but also a matter of regularization.”³¹ Sexuality is a convergence point between disciplinary power and biopower. The libidinal processes of the individual body implicate its reproductive capabilities from the individual to the population.

In this situation, medicine comes to play a pivotal role as it is not only preoccupied with the individual body of the living being in terms of its health, but it also develops a social function in the form of what we now call public health—“to medicalize the population.”³² The techniques of surveillance, which before were focused on the production of docile bodies—the criminals and the deviants—now take a central seat in the mechanism of biopolitics.³³ To manage the population, it is necessary to record, archive, and document all these data on population trends from birth rates to death and mortalities—in a word, surveillance.

Due to these developments in the 17th and 18th centuries, the problematization of the population became a new object of study—birth and death rates were measured and recorded—through the use of demography and statistics. To achieve political and economic effects in the management of life, biopolitics emerged, according to Foucault, as an extension of disciplinary power.

Despite the shift of attention from the individual body to the general population entailed in the emergence of biopolitics, biopower retains a similar function to disciplinary power, the creation of the norm, which, in the context of population, is the creation of regulations. Foucault writes, “The norm is something that is applied to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize.”³⁴

The discussion of the function of biopolitics to regularize the population takes an interesting turn in his 1977 and 1978 lectures because although these works mention biopolitics, the trajectory seems to veer off to a new field in Foucault’s studies: governmentality or “the art of governance.” Thus, we can sympathize with Patton’s claim that Foucault’s works on biopolitics and biopower do not play a major role in his work but that he also abandons this due to conceptual inconsistencies.³⁵

³¹ Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 251–252.

³² *Ibid.*, 244.

³³ Foucault writes, “it is these processes—the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on—together with a whole series of related economic and political problems [...] which, in the second half of the eighteenth century, become biopolitics first objects of knowledge and targets it seeks to control.” *Ibid.*, 243.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁵ See Patton, “Agamben and Foucault.”

Tersely, in his 1977–1978 lectures, “Security, Territory, Population,” he provides a genealogy of the administration and management of populations, which, going back to his 1976 lectures, defines his biopolitics. Key to this genealogy is the norm of regulation which is central to the techniques of biopolitics. He traces the norm of regulation from the pastoral power of the Church to the development of the principle of *raison d'état* and the formation of the science of the police. In the context of this paper, it can be argued that what Foucault achieves in these lectures, particularly on the notions just mentioned, is that he laid down the basic premise of showing how the management and administration of population through the norm of regulation can be traced back to a series of phenomena that may have begun with the pastoral care of souls, through baptisms and death records etc., and the eclipsing of the government function over the sovereign in the affairs of the state. This line of thought will have a direct bearing on the first lecture of his 1978–1979 lectures at the College de France entitled, “The Birth of Biopolitics.” In this lecture in 1978, Foucault’s investigation brings his earlier preoccupation of biopolitics as management of population and his discussion on the principle of *raison d'état* and the science of the police together to diagnose and formulate what he calls the “art of government” or governmentality, which is a “study of the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty.”³⁶ What this means is that he wants to investigate how government, as it operates in considered democratic societies today, emerged to unite politics and economy while sovereign power, in a way, is dispersed to the multifarious government practices and processes, which effectively places the concept of sovereign power to the periphery. At this juncture, his investigation wants to analyze the rationalizations that came about in the foundation of the state and the relegation of its survival through government practices. Interestingly, this led him to “liberalism”³⁷ as the government practice of “not to govern too much.”³⁸ He comes to a full circle, although indeed incompletely, when, at the end of his lecture, he connects this governmentality with the management of the population, which makes biopolitics possible.³⁹ After this, he never seemed to return to the question of biopolitics again. But if we follow through with his articulations of biopolitics, despite their gaps and inconsistencies, two important elements can be given attention.

First, his biopolitics, which already in his 1976 “The Right to Death and Power over Life,” explicates biopower as an “indispensable element in

³⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

the development of capitalism,"⁴⁰ is tacitly repeated in the 1978 "The Birth of Biopolitics" in a way that biopolitics coincides with liberalism and the principle of *laissez-faire*. Both are crucial elements of the democracy and capitalism of today despite their variations. Second, from his 1976 work to his 1978 lectures, Foucault shows the emergence of biopolitics as a development and weaning away from unitary sovereign power to its dispersed form in the management and administration of life. This is captured with his forays into governmentality. These will have bearings in the claim of this paper, as I show later.

Agamben's *Homo Sacer* Project: Reformulating Foucault's Biopolitics

A Correction or at least a Completion: Agamben's Point of Departure from Foucault

Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze claim that Agamben's publication of "Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life" in 1995, translated in 1998 to English, sparked a "biopolitical turn" in the humanities and social sciences in the English-speaking world.⁴¹ Due to Foucault's abandonment of the biopolitical project—either because of his death or its inherent conceptual inconsistencies, or both—that Agamben reinvigorates Foucault's biopolitics by taking the latter to be "corrected, or at least, completed."⁴²

We can cite two points for Agamben's point of departure. First, Agamben aims to render transparent the opaque source of power between two general registries in Foucault's conception of power, which the latter articulated in a 1982 seminar at the University of Vermont: the "study of the political techniques" in which the State places the individual under its care (his genealogy from pastoral power to the *science of the police* is an example), and the account that analyzes the processes in which an individual becomes a subject, "an examination of the *technologies of the self*."⁴³ What these two

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol 1., 141.

⁴¹ Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (eds), *Biopolitics: A Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2013), 4.

⁴² Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 11.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8. Foucault writes, "It is the last two, the technologies of domination and self, which have most kept my attention. I have attempted a history of the organization of knowledge with respect to both domination and the self. For example, I studied madness not in terms of the criteria of formal sciences but to show how a type of management of individuals inside and outside of asylums was made possible by this strange discourse. This contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality." Michel

directives in Foucault's thinking of power reveal is, according to Agamben, an implicit relation in which the "process of subjectivization" intractably adheres to external power and the State's exercise to integrate individuals under its care is necessarily linked to an individual. For Agamben, their relation remains unarticulated by Foucault. Second, Foucault's model of biopolitics does not take into consideration the forces of totalitarianism and fascism that, despite seeing their apex in the Third Reich more than a century ago, have not disappeared but remain seemingly benign and dormant, waiting for its explicit activation.

One only has to recall that during the COVID pandemic, the exercise of biopolitics was at its most explicit during the global emergency. And yet, despite Foucault's conception that is weaned away from the recourse to a sovereign principle as an explanation, there has never been a time since the Second World War that the sovereign exercise of power by nation-states, regardless of its alignment to democracy, is also as explicit through, among other things, the lockdowns that temporarily suspended what have been considered as inviolable rights.⁴⁴

Owing to these two cases, Agamben endeavors to "correct, or at least, to complete" Foucault's biopolitics to provide a theory of power that explicates the link between techniques of domination and technologies of the self and to account for the undying force of totalitarianism and fascism in an age of democracy's ascendancy, or what Fukuyama describes as the end of history.⁴⁵ This correction or completion of Foucault, a reinvigoration and a reformulation of his biopolitics, inaugurates Agamben's biopolitical project.

Since Agamben's biopolitics may span more than his entire *Homo Sacer* series of nine volumes written in two decades, a brief summative account may be necessary. Since we are not concerned with Agamben's overall project, I only focus on answering what and how his biopolitics is a reformulation of Foucault's. In doing so, I also provide an articulation of Agamben's biopolitics, even if only piecemeal.

Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," Lectures at University of Vermont Oct. 1982, in *Technologies of the Self* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49, <<https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en/#:~:text=As%20a%20context,%20we%20must%20understand%20that%20there%20are%20four#:~:text=As%20a%20context,%20we%20must%20understand%20that%20there%20are%20four>>.

⁴⁴ I disagree with Sergei Prozorov's conclusions that, because of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Agamben's intellectual interventions through a series of essays published during the pandemic, the latter's biopolitics become indefensible as a coherent and consistent theory. I will not, however, develop the argument of my disagreement here. See Sergei Prozorov, "A Farewell to Homo Sacer? Sovereign Power and Bare Life in Agamben's Coronavirus Commentary," in *Law and Critique* 34, (2023), 63–80. DOI: 10.1007/s10978-021-09314-x.

⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

An Initial Account of Agamben's Biopolitics

Following the two points of Agamben's point of departure from Foucault, the latter's correction or completion lies in another reinvigoration of concept, which in Foucault should have already been rendered *passee* and must be abandoned, the principle of sovereignty as the source of (bio)political power.

Agamben doubles down on Foucault's claim that biopolitics, which subsumes disciplinary power, is initiated with the entry of the human being as a living being into political calculations, beginning around the 17th century. For if biopolitics and biopower serve as the paradigm that defines modernity, its contrivances of managing and administering populations through demography, statistics and policy interventions should be able to sufficiently account for the violence effected by the totalitarianism that sprang at the height of modernity in which the *shoah* was its most brutal and atrocious enactment. Using his conception of biopolitics, Foucault attempts to explain, in his 1977 lecture, that: Nazism is an example in which "the most murderous States are also, of necessity, the most racists" because "racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger..."⁴⁶ However, this "death-function in the economy of biopower" has to reckon with the sovereign power of the State that made possible the event to occur. An analysis of the state and sovereign power is absent in Foucault precisely because, for him, they are already obsolete. The *shoah* was not a phenomenon that killed and murdered in dispersed networks; it was rather a unitary and systematic event of the state. With all of the State's legal apparatuses in effect, it was a state-wide systematic program to produce dead bodies as effectively as, to take from Heidegger, modern agricultural machines harvest and process crops.⁴⁷

Thus, for Agamben, Foucault's biopolitics has to be completed or corrected to account not only for the management of population and other models of biopolitical control that arose in the politicization of human beings as a living entity but also for the return of the king, *nomos basileus*. It was necessary to make sense of the violence perpetuated by the state, which a theory of regulations and norms of living beings cannot make sense. Reformulating Foucault's biopolitics, Agamben considers a double

⁴⁶ Foucault, "Society Must be Defended", 258–59; 258.

⁴⁷ Heidegger writes "Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs." Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. by Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 27.

movement of the entry of the living being to the juridical-political order and its exclusion from the same order. This double relation is an inclusion-exclusion. This defines what Agamben, following Carl Schmitt, calls the exception.⁴⁸ Biopolitics, for Agamben, is this exceptional relation in which the living being, natural life, enters into political calculations only to be excluded. This inclusion-exclusion entails the intimate relation between the life produced and the power that produced it. By being included in the juridical-political order and excluded from it, the living being does not remain unconditioned as natural life but is imbued with a legal recognition that, in its exclusion, is left legally without conditions. This life is what Agamben calls *la nuda vita* or bare life. The power that produces bare life is sovereign power.

The eponymous *homo sacer* of his work is a character of ancient Roman law which Agamben employs as a case of bare life. Its inclusion in the juridical order allows it to be declared *sacred*, which in Roman Law entails the abandonment of the law. This abandonment of the law, however, does not mean that the law is no longer in effect, but rather the law remains in effect that the man declared sacred is no longer within the law. *Homo Sacer* is the character who, in law, has been left out, but in its being left out, the law remains in effect. Thus, the *homo sacer* is without any legal status, which makes it vulnerable to being killed without being a victim of homicide or murder; however, because *homo sacer* by its nature of being made sacred, that is, belonging to the Gods and no longer to the human community, that it also cannot be sacrificed.⁴⁹

In this context, we take Foucault to remind ourselves of the situation we are in: "we still have not cut off the head of the king."⁵⁰ What was exiled in his biopolitics makes its return in Agamben's reformulation. However, the sovereign power, likewise, is reconceptualized in Agamben, who sees it as intractable to bare life. Their relation is what Agamben, borrowing from Jean-Luc Nancy, calls the sovereign ban: to be banned is to be exiled but paradoxically also to belong, i.e., as a band.⁵¹

Their intractability lies in the classical assertion that if "sovereignty is the highest, legally, independent, underived power,"⁵² then the sovereign must be defined, according to Schmitt, "as the one who decides the exception."⁵³ Sovereign power is founded on the exception because, being the

⁴⁸ See Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 12–13.

⁴⁹ For instance, see Agamben's discussion on the relation between sovereignty and sacralization in which the figure of *homo sacer* is the effect. Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 72.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol 1., 88–89.

⁵¹ Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 27–28.

⁵² Carl Schmitt, *Four Theses on Political Theology*, trans. by Georg Schwab (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1985), 17.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

highest, it lies neither within the law nor outside the law but makes the law and the juridical sphere possible in the first place. It is the source of what public law calls constituent power.⁵⁴ By deciding the exception, it is, therefore, what defines the norm, what constitutes an emergency and what defines public welfare and safety.

For sovereign power to exercise its original function means that it cannot but be entangled with life to which the exception is enacted. Thus, the exceptional relation links sovereign power and bare life. On one hand, sovereign power produces bare life to found the juridical order. While on the other hand, the condition of our living existence so far as it is a part of the juridical order, is all virtual bare life. It is a matter of time and circumstance in which the virtuality of our precarious existence becomes real when our bare lives are actualized by the sovereign decision to declare the exception.

This is, in succinct but general form, Agamben's reformulation of Foucault's biopolitics. If we are to understand biopolitics in its essential function, then it is, for Agamben, "the production of a biopolitical body," which is "the original activity of sovereign power."⁵⁵ Unlike Foucault, who takes biopolitics as a product of historical and technical developments and serves as a "threshold of modernity," Agamben considers it the originary political event; thus, it is as ancient as humankind's first cities. The establishment of the political order originally entails capturing life to produce a qualified life that has no qualification at all: bare life, a life that can be killed with impunity. Another distinction between Foucault's and Agamben's biopolitics is that the former regulates life to establish norms; the latter, on the other hand, is defined by establishing the norm as a law that binds life to it.⁵⁶ In this sense, too, Agamben sees his biopolitics as completing the link between the technology of domination and the techniques of the self since they can be comprehended in relation to the sovereign ban.

Capitalism, Liberalism and Biopolitics in Agamben and Foucault

Despite the already radical departure of Agamben's biopolitics from Foucault's, if we take a look at the development of Foucault and Agamben's discourses on biopolitics, a noticeable similarity surfaces. Even in 1976, in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault was clear that biopolitics is related to capitalism to the point that the latter is possible because of the

⁵⁴ See footnote 63.

⁵⁵ Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 9.

⁵⁶ Also see Catherine Mills's discussion on how Foucault's *norma* is distinguished from Agamben's *nomos*. Catherine Mills, "Biopolitics, Liberal Eugenics, and Nihilism" in *Sovereignty and Life*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2007), 189.

former.⁵⁷ He repeats this again, albeit tacitly, in the 1978 work *The Birth of Biopolitics*, when he connects governmentality to the development of capitalism. But without going into details, he claims that it is biopolitics that, again, makes liberalism—and in effect, capitalism—possible.

Agamben, on the other hand, also speaks of biopolitics, but with less intensity, as intertwined with capitalism. Like Foucault, he does not elaborate on a theory of capitalism or a critique of it as much as post-Marxist thinkers do. In the introduction to his 1995 work, the first part of his *Homo Sacer* project, Agamben suggests that the biopolitical condition that defines the relation between sovereign power and bare life may be the root of the decadence of modern democracy. Although not explicit about capitalism, Agamben uses the term “post-democratic spectacular societies.”⁵⁸ Remaining less explanatory in his 1995 work about the spectacular capitalism that defines post-democratic societies, Agamben followed through with an analysis that implicates these societies in his 2007 work, *The Kingdom and Glory*, which is marked in the Omnibus edition as *Homo Sacer II.4*.

To be clear, Agamben did not focus his analysis in his 2007 work on post-democratic societies or capitalism, per se; rather, he was concerned with investigating, through philosophical archaeology, the emergence of these post-democratic societies. Subtly but surely, Agamben follows Foucault's trajectory on biopolitics, which was left abandoned by the latter but continued by the former. When Foucault seems to have written his last few words on biopolitics, “only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is,”⁵⁹ Agamben picked it up to continue where Foucault left off.

In the beginning lines of *The Kingdom and Glory*, Agamben states that this work “locates itself in the wake” of Foucault's work on governmentality

⁵⁷Foucault writes “I will try to show how the central core of all the problems that I am presently trying to identify is what is called population. Consequently, this is the basis on which something like biopolitics could be formed. But it seems to me that the analysis of biopolitics can only get under way when we have understood the general regime of this governmental reason I have talked about, this general regime that we can call the question of truth, of economic truth in the first place, within governmental reason [...] only when we know what this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is.” Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 21–22.

⁵⁸ Agamben writes, “Modern democracy's decadence and gradual convergence with totalitarian states in post-democratic societies (which begins to become evident with Alexis de Tocqueville and finds its final sanction in the analyses of Guy Debord) may well be rooted in this aporia, which marks the beginning of modern democracy and forces it into complicity with its most implacable enemy.” Agamben, “Homo Sacer,” 12. Debord's “Society of Spectacle” was a diagnosis and critique of how capitalist society has reached a point of development that everything is mediated and dominated by images and spectacle. See Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, trans. by Ken Knabb (London: Aldgate Press, no date).

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22.

to investigate “the paths by which and the reasons why power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*, that is a government of men.”⁶⁰ In his 1995 work, Agamben mentions, “The present inquiry concerns precisely this hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power.”⁶¹ But what he managed to explicate so far in 1995 is the juridico-institutional pole, focusing on the sovereign ban that ties sovereign power and bare life together—the originary political event. However, he did not sufficiently explain how these biopolitical power models operate in relation to the sovereign ban. What he takes as the “biopolitical power models” in the 1995 work finds its clarity only in the 2007 book. These biopolitical models belong to what Agamben calls the paradigm of government, which has eclipsed the principle of sovereignty in modern democracies. This precisely shows Agamben’s continuation, if not a completion, of Foucault’s abandoned project.⁶² It is at this point that they both converge again.

Agamben’s biopolitics can have a fuller picture if we take into consideration not only the sovereign and juridical axis of its power but rather, also the opposite axis that has come to, as he has mentioned, dominate modernity, the axis of economy and government. Thus, Agamben’s reformulation of Foucault’s biopolitics has to reckon with, after their departure and divergence, this convergence once again with the master’s abandoned project. However, because of the scope of Agamben’s investigation into the paradigm of economy, I do not intend to expound on its details. In uncovering a theory of economy or government, in its distinct sense as management, Agamben aims to account for how modern democracies—what Foucault calls in his lectures as liberalism—operate and emerge as a power that configures today’s democracies. This is not, however, a theory of public administration or political science, as we understand now.

These two pillars of Western politics that Agamben articulates in the 2007 work are Kingdom and Government. The former corresponds to the juridico-political, the latter to the economic-management. Taking from Joseph Sieyes and the theory of public law, the Kingdom can be taken to the paradigm that grants legitimacy; it is the constituent power, while the Economy is the paradigm that grants legality; it is constituted power.⁶³ In

⁶⁰ Giorgio Agamben, “The Kingdom and The Glory,” in *Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 369.

⁶¹ Agamben, “Homo Sacer,” 9.

⁶² Agamben, “The Kingdom and The Glory,” 373.

⁶³ Constituting or constituent power is contradistinguished from constituted power. These concepts in public law, which Agamben oftentimes use to discuss the relation between the conceptual pair of Kingdom and Government, Legitimacy and Legality, is derived from Joseph Sieyes in his theorization of a legitimizing force of a nation without recourse to the monarch and

totalitarian and fascist states, the paradigm of the Kingdom is ascendant, but in modern democracies, it is the paradigm of Economy.

In this work, Agamben presents a genealogy of how the paradigm of economy eclipses the paradigm of Kingdom with the arrival of modernity. The principle, "the king reigns, but does not govern," which hangs over the parliaments of constitutional monarchies that are also at once modern democracies, is a testament to this threshold in which sovereign power gives way to government. This is the same trajectory that Foucault's work on governmentality seeks to explain. However, unlike him, Agamben seeks to dig deeper in his archaeology of economy to show that, like his archaeology of the sovereign ban in his earlier works, the economy is older than what modernity seems to suggest. He explicates that both the genesis and the structure of the paradigm of the economy have their genealogical source in both the Trinitarian economy and Paul's economy of mystery. In the attempt of the early Church Fathers to not only comprehend God's being, but also to secure for the church a lasting monotheism, they theologized God's singularity in the economy of three persons.⁶⁴ So, to understand how "power in the West has assumed the form of an *oikonomia*"⁶⁵ is to understand the structure of the Trinitarian economy and the reversals it has affected in the entire history of Western thought as a whole.⁶⁶

Agamben, again, has a long and rigorous articulation on this which no longer belongs to our present concern. But in our endeavor to articulate Agamben's reformulation of Foucault, which begins as a correction or completion of Foucault, only to diverge in situating biopolitics not as a development in modernity but as an originary political event, and to converge again back to the ascendancy of government as the dominant power today in democracies, we are however faced with an aporia that needs to be disentangled if we pursue in giving a consistent picture, even if only in general terms, of the biopolitical structure of the contemporary times.

its divine right basis. See Emmanuel Joseph Seiyès, *Political Writings*, ed. Michael Sonenscher. Indianapolis: Hackett 2003), 34, 136.

⁶⁴ For instance, Hippolytus writes, "the Father gives orders, the Word performs the work, and is revealed through the Son, through whom belief is accorded to the Father. By a harmonious economy the result is a single God. This is because there is one God. For the one who commands is the Father, the one who obeys is the Son, and the one who promotes mutual understanding is the Holy Spirit. He who is the Father is over all things, and the Son is through all things, and the Holy Spirit is in all things." Hippolytus, *Contra Noetum* 14, 4–5; 74–7, quoted from Nicholas Heron, *Liturgical Power: Between Economic and Theological Power* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 27.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁶⁶ In Agamben, this refers to the ascendance of the paradigm of economy and government. It is not only the sovereign that is eclipsed by government, but also a whole range of dual categories that configures the West, e.g., being and action, *theoria* and *praxis*, transcendence and immanence, primary and second substances, etc.

Crucial to our concern, however, is that this structure, the twin pillars, imparts to us how the move towards authoritarianism or totalitarianism, which highlights the paradigm of Kingdom, is informed by the paradigm of Economy, which is ascendant among liberal democracies, and vice-versa, belongs to the same political and juridical order. Following Sieyes theory, as mentioned earlier, if one of the main tenets of liberal democracies is suffrage in which sovereignty emanates from the People, and government is established and legitimized by sovereignty, then government actions and measures, particularly, under the reason of public welfare and as long as it operates within its laws, which Foucault has devoted time to investigate as the "*raison d'état*," can allow for this transition to be possible without break or discontinuity from its political and juridical situation; that is, it remains democratic. More importantly, the same power that holds them together but distinguished only as different modes is, for Agamben, biopolitics. A unitary account which Foucault is not able to see.

Thus, in going back to an earlier work in the series, *State of Exception*, Agamben's survey of historical moments in which democracies transition to authoritarianism, fascism, or totalitarianism can be explained not as breaks from democratic traditions but a continuity that—precisely because of the logic of the sovereign ban and the structure of the twin pillars of politics—puts into question the distinction between the two. For instance, the twelve-year reign of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich from 1933–1945 was legitimately and legally possible due to constitutional provisions of the Weimar Constitution and the Enabling Act of 1933. But what is more insidious is not only the constitutional dictatorship of Hitler, but also the opening of the Concentration Camps which was, as Agamben cites Drobisch and Wieland, "an immediate effect of the National Socialist Revolution."⁶⁷ The Concentration Camp, which history teaches us to be the situation that manifests the worst of humanity, is for Agamben the paradigm of biopolitics where "*homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen."⁶⁸ But what concerns us here as the "inner solidarity" between democracies and authoritarianism can be grasped in the question that Agamben posed regarding the Camps. He writes:

The correct question to pose concerning the horrors committed in the camps is, therefore, not the hypocritical one of how crimes of such atrocity could be committed against human beings. It would be more honest and, above all, more useful to investigate carefully the juridical procedures and deployments of power by

⁶⁷ Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 139.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime.⁶⁹

Another example that Agamben cites is the Patriot Act of 2001 of the United States of America, a legislation born from the wake of the September 11 attack. This law allows for the detention of aliens suspected of harming the "the national security of the United States" without trial. Agamben points out that what makes this law biopolitically significant is that I quote in length:

it radically erases any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being. Not only do the Taliban captured in Afghanistan not enjoy the status of POWs as defined by the Geneva Convention, they do not even have the status of persons charged with a crime according to American laws. Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply 'detainees,' they are the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well...The only thing to which it could possibly be compared is the legal situation of the Jews in the Nazi *Lager* [camps], who, along with their citizenship, had lost very legal identity, but at least retained their identity as Jews.⁷⁰

It is at these junctures, what Agamben calls states of exception, whether in 20th century Germany or the 21st century America, whether a state identifies to be democratic or fascist, that biopolitics cannot merely be relegated to the management of population or art of governmentality as Foucault's investigations show. Rather, biopolitics also informs the awesome terror of sovereign power on life, either through government measures in the democratic fashions of elections and parliamentary legislations or in more direct State actions. It is in this sense that despite Foucault's veering way from the sovereign power for disciplinal power and the administration of life, Agamben completes and continues his biopolitics by accounting for Foucault's shifting investigations of power as one and the same thing.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Giorgio Agamben, "State of Exception," in *Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 169.

Conclusion: Agamben's Reformulation of Foucault's Biopolitics

Foucault's biopolitical project, which was never completed, sought to comprehend the political technologies and techniques in which the "fostering of life" complexifies to become the management and administration of entire populations. His investigation into these emergent political technologies continues his veering away from the traditional conception of sovereign power. His earlier preoccupation with disciplinary power, which was concerned with *techai* that absorb individual bodies for political calculations in order to produce docile bodies for regulation, is not upended by his biopolitics but is, in fact, subsumed to permeate it. Foucault's biopolitics, however, started to move in different directions, from his investigation of pastoral power to governmentality. After a passing mention of biopolitics and its relation to liberalism and governmentality, Foucault no longer expounded on the topic.

Agamben's biopolitics is marked, as we have shown, by twists and turns in his convergences and divergences from Foucault. Seeking to correct or complete Foucault's biopolitics, Agamben problematizes Foucault as being unable to account for the undying violence of the state power, a power that recurses back to the sovereign principle which Foucault no longer believes is ascendant. Thus, taking from this point of departure, Agamben agrees with Foucault on the importance of biopolitics as the horizon in which we can view the present with clarity but disagrees with Foucault that this biopolitics can make sense of the world today without recourse to sovereign power. Agamben's biopolitics not only sought to reformulate Foucault's biopolitics but also to provide a new theory of sovereignty that cannot but be biopolitical. Hence, for Agamben, biopolitics is defined by the originary political event of sovereign power producing bare life, the life that emerges after the entry of natural life into calculations of the juridico-political domain to be excluded from it. This places bare life, the protagonist of Agamben's biopolitics, as statusless, a life that can be killed with impunity.

However, Agamben's biopolitics, which diverged from Foucault early on, finds its way back again to converge with Foucault's investigations on governmentality. For Agamben, the axis of sovereign power is only one paradigm of power. For him, following also Foucault, he wants to continue the latter's investigation in determining why the government of men, the paradigm that defines modern democracies today, is now in ascendance. This does not mean that Agamben no longer thinks of sovereign power as contributing to the biopolitics of the present. Rather, in a very nuanced thinking, he places sovereign power and the paradigm of government together to form a model of power that articulates both sovereign power and government or economy power as one machine in different modalities. He

arrives at this conception by undertaking an archaeology of economy that brought him back to the earliest and most defined model of economic power in the Trinity of Western theology. Although Agamben hardly discusses sovereign power in the 2007 work, this does not mean that he has scuttled, like Foucault, the principle of sovereignty in his quest to comprehend power. Rather, sovereign power in governmentality is a transformation, following Foucault's earlier insight, of power to dispersed forms in the different offices and institutions, both public and private.

When Agamben articulates in 1995 that democracies and totalitarianism share an "inner solidarity,"⁷¹ it is because, following through the development of his political thought, both democracies and totalitarianisms are founded on the original relation between sovereign power and life—the biopolitical. For Agamben, this entails the production of bare life by sovereign power as the originary political event.

The current geopolitical climate that initially astounds many political analysts in seeing radical shifts in, at least, western democracies to far-right orientations should not come so much as a surprise. We should not miss the fact that 1933 to 1945 Germany was legitimately and legally democratic. The constitutional dictatorship of Adolf Hitler was made possible through democratic lines following constitutional provisions and the passage of the Enabling Act of 1933. The United States of America, often considered as the champion of western democracies, has enacted legislations and measures that, in protecting its democracy, seems indistinguishable from acts that do not seem to adhere to democratic ideals. In the same sense, the decade rule of Ferdinand Marcos Sr., in the Philippines, under martial law, operates within the constitutional provision that, following the principle of democracies, is constituted through the power of the people—democracy.

*The Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, Manila
Department of Philosophy, University of San Carlos, Cebu
The Philippines*

References

- Abbott, Matthew, *The Figure of this World: Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
- Agamben, Giorgio, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For A Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* trans. by Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁷¹ Agamben, "Homo Sacer," 12.

- _____, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).
- _____, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009).
- _____, *The Use of Bodies* trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).
- Bussolini, Jeffrey, "Critical Encounter Between Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault," in *Foucault Studies* 10 (2010), 108–143.
- Campbell, Timothy and Adam Sitze (Eds.), *Biopolitics: A Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2013).
- de la Durantaye, Leland, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- Esposito, Roberto, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* trans. by Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).
- _____, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France 1975–1976* trans. by David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003).
- _____, "Technologies of the Self: Lectures at University of Vermont," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Foucault* ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).
<https://foucault.info/documents/foucault.technologiesOfSelf.en/>.
- _____, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978–1979* trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2008).
- _____, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol.1* trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).
- Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
- Harris, G.W., "Bio-Politics," in *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, and Art*. 10:9 (December 28, 1911).
- Heidegger, Martin, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking* trans. by Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
- Heron, Nicholas, *Liturgical Power: Between Economic and Theological Power* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018).
- Kotsko, Adam and Carlo Salzani (Eds), *Agamben's Philosophical Lineage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
- Mills, Catherine, *Biopolitics* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

152 AGAMBEN'S REFORMULATION

- _____, "Biopolitics, Liberal Eugenics, and Nihilism," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life* ed. by Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- Ojakangas, Mika, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault," in *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005), 5–28.
- _____, *On The Greek Origins of Biopolitics: A Reinterpretation of the History of Biopower* (London: Routledge, 2016).
- Patton, Paul, "Agamben and Foucault on Biopower and Biopolitics," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life* ed. by Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- PHAVISMINDA, "46th Phavisminda International Conference: Rationale" (7 June 2024), <<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=802320675358764&set=pcb.7656134544472362>>.
- Prozorov, Sergei, "A Farewell to Homo Sacer? Sovereign Power and Bare Life in Agamben's Coronavirus Commentary," in *Law and Critique* 34 (2023), 63–80. DOI: 10.1007/s10978-021-09314-x.
- Schmitt, Carl, *Four Theses on Political Theology* trans. by Georg Schwab (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1985).

Home as Heterotopia: Describing the *unheimlich* through a Foucauldian Heterotopology of Home¹

**Vidya M. George
Koshy Tharakan**

Abstract: The experience of the *unheimlich*, interpreted by Paul Ricoeur as the sense of otherness in a space, is indescribable in terms of the classic description of home. To generate a new perspective to overcome this “blocked situation,” we reflect on a “heterotopology of home,” i.e., a description of Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia (an “other space”) as a metaphor for home. After considering heterotopia as a fluid concept that allows “displacement” to the new situation of home, a heterotopology of home is described by summarizing and analyzing the multitude of past readings of home as heterotopia through Hilde Heynen’s framework. A reflection on the heterotopology of home reinterprets the experience of the *heimlich* and understanding of selfhood in relation to the *unheimlich*, as exemplified through Mariana Ortega’s accounts of “hometactics” and “multiplicitous selves” and Georg Simmel’s notion of “the stranger.” In conclusion, we argue that a Foucauldian heterotopology of home overcomes the blocked situation by transforming the perception of home: the experience of the *unheimlich* becomes describable in the terms of home as heterotopia. In this process, the instances of heterotopia are extended from “other spaces” to spaces of everyday life, also transforming the previous description of heterotopia.

Keywords: Foucault, heterotopia, *heimlich*, *unheimlich*

¹ We sincerely thank the external referee, whose meticulous feedback and insightful suggestions have greatly improved this paper. The first author remains deeply indebted to *Hermeneutics in Real Life (HinRL)* and Vidyasagar Sharma (Bielefeld University, Germany) for sharing resources and engaging in discussions on Ricoeur’s metaphor theory and the notion of belonging, respectively.

The *unheimlich* within Home: A Blocked Situation

When thinking about space, one of the oppositions we continue to regard as a simple given is the one between different spaces and spaces of alterity. While an approach towards space based on the notion of alterity, or radical otherness, suggests a separation between certain “other spaces” and the spaces of everyday life, that which is based on difference suggests no such radical separation but comprising only a lack of similarity. In the context of the former approach, it is often assumed that a sense of belonging in space is assured within the spaces of everyday life, in spite of the variegated nature of such spaces. Also, it is commonly assumed that a sense of otherness is experienced only within the other spaces of alterity. In this section, we will take up the case of home, a space of everyday life, to problematize these assumptions.

In many cultures worldwide, in varied forms, home remains a classic and conservative instance of a privileged category of space. The primordality and normative power of home are such that “our bodily encounters in other places are stylized according to the home’s normative stylizing of our bodies.”² Home is a “symbolic environment”³: the notion of home is imbued with and evocative of a sense of belonging, a being at ease, a being in one’s place in the world. The “personal, intimate, feeling of being ‘at home’ in a place (place-belongingness)”⁴ may be related to what Paul Ricoeur calls the “*heimlich*.” Ricoeur interprets the *heimlich* as a fundamental human need, expressed and represented in the deliberate act of building a home.⁵

Many a time, however, the experience of the *heimlich* within home remains a “myth”—it is not simply given in the actual, material space of a home.⁶ Home is often the site where the self experiences the feeling of uneasiness as in the feeling of “not being in one’s place, of not feeling at home.” The “sense of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement”⁷ experienced in a place may be related to what Ricoeur calls the “*unheimlich*.”

² Janet Donohoe, “The Place of Home,” in *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology*, 23 (Spring 2012), 17.

³ See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, “The Home as Symbolic Environment,” in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, ed. by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁴ Marco Antonsich, “Searching for Belonging: An Analytical Framework,” in *Geography Compass*, 4 (2010), 645.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “Uncanniness Many Times Over,” in *Philosophical Anthropology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 264.

⁶ Mariana Ortega, “Hometactics,” in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 169.

⁷ Antonsich, “Searching for Belonging,” 649.

He observes that, in contrast to the feeling of familiarity in the experience of the *heimlich*, the sense of otherness in the experience of the *unheimlich* is at the “height of its feeling of strangeness.”⁸ In Ricoeur’s interpretation, the *unheimlich* is a “realm of emptiness” that haunts us⁹—the *heimlich* expressed and represented in the act of building or constructing a home never succeeds in eclipsing the *unheimlich*.¹⁰

This brief account of home suggests that the *unheimlich* is experienced even within the spaces of everyday life and is a more common experience than typically assumed. This view aligns with Ricoeur, who considers both placing and displacing oneself as primordial human activities. For Ricoeur, the reality of the *unheimlich* is such that every displaced person experiences it, and it is sometimes even cultivated for itself “an ethics of roaming, of uprootedness.”¹¹

As we can see, the experience of the *unheimlich* within the home is indescribable in terms of its classic description. This presents a “blocked situation,”¹² which then invites the generation of a new perspective of home to describe the experience of the *unheimlich* within its space. In recent years, the notion of home in terms of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* experienced within it has been a poignant theme for many writers. However, many such accounts do not do justice to both the noetic (the subjective) and the noematic

⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “Inhabited Space,” in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 39. The intriguing notion of the *unheimlich* was expounded by Sigmund Freud in a 1919 essay, translated into English as “The ‘Uncanny’” by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958). Heidegger translates the *unheimlich* as “not at home” to pronounce the normative constitution of humans as beings that are essentially not-at-home in a temporal-historical way (Diego D’Angelo, “To Be or Not to Be at Home. Heidegger and Derrida Reading Sophocles,” in *Kritike*, 14 (2021), 112). Unlike Heidegger, Ricoeur discusses the *unheimlich* to explore “the phenomenon of the strange” in spatial-geographical terms and emphasizes the primordially of both placement and displacement for human beings (Ricoeur, “Uncanniness,” 260).

⁹ Ricoeur, “Inhabited Space,” 149.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, “Uncanniness,” 264. To convey our Foucauldian intuition that the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* are actual experiences in a space and not states or conditions given or guaranteed through the material or structural form of the space, we have used the adjective pair instead of the corresponding noun pair *Heimlichkeit–Unheimlichkeit* in our analysis. We thank the anonymous referee for urging us to reflect on this technical distinction.

¹¹ Ricoeur, “Uncanniness,” 264. Even as we practice the ethics of roaming and uprootedness, it is possible to stay attached and loyal to our “home.” This is what Appiah calls “rooted cosmopolitanism” or “cosmopolitan patriotism” wherein one is “attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people” (Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (Spring 1997), 618).

¹² Paul Ricoeur, “Fiction (4): Models,” in *Lectures on Imagination*, ed. by George H. Taylor, Robert D. Sweeney, Jean-Luc Amalric, and Patrick F. Cosby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2024), 263.

(the objective) dimensions of the intentionality of the act of perceiving home. Often, an individual's inability to experience *heimlich* in a space is understood exclusively in terms of the actions and conduct of the individual, a psychological explanation of the phenomenon of not being at home that overemphasizes a socially decontextualized individualism. Such accounts separate the experience of the *heimlich* from the "politics of belonging"—the dimension of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion—an approach Marco Antonsich cautions us against.¹³ On the other hand, structural-functional approaches to the phenomenon ignore the subjective elements and read the *unheimlich* solely in terms of the objective structures that constitute the home, such as the patriarchal structures of society,¹⁴ ignoring the personal, individual dimension of the experience of the *heimlich*. Given the shortcomings of these accounts, the invitation to generate a new perspective of home that can describe the experience of the *unheimlich* within its space remains open.

In sum, the *unheimlich*, interpreted by Ricoeur as the sense of otherness in a space, is a more common experience than is typically assumed in an approach towards space based on the notion of alterity. It is experienced even within a space of everyday life such as home—a reality indescribable in terms of the classic description of home. This blocked situation calls for the generation of a new perspective to overcome it. We propose that such a new (and better) perspective can be generated by reflecting on a "heterotopology of home," i.e., a description that takes Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (an "other space") as a metaphor for home. In the next section, we will engage with the concept of heterotopia to explore the possibility of considering home as heterotopia.

Foucault's Heterotopia: A Fluid and Displaceable Concept

In this section, we will introduce Foucault's concept of heterotopia, contextualize it within his broader theory of space, and describe it in terms of its principles. By engaging with ongoing debates and discussions surrounding the meanings of the concept, we will show that the fluidity of heterotopia is such that it allows itself to be displaced to new situations, such as the situation of home, as a metaphor.

Foucault's concept of heterotopia has become crucial to thinking about space, especially since the spatial turn in the social sciences and

¹³ Antonsich, "Searching for Belonging," 645.

¹⁴ Koshy Tharakan and Payel Chattopadhyay Mukherjee, "At Home as an 'Outsider': Subarnalata and Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side," in *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 7 (2022), 1–2, <<https://doi.org/10.53007/SJGC.2022.V7.I2.47>>.

humanities.¹⁵ The spatial turn is an ongoing “response to a longstanding ontological and epistemological bias that privileges time over space in all the human sciences, including spatial disciplines like geography and architecture.”¹⁶ Following its “long, slow, and painful undertaking,” it is being reasserted that space matters because “where events unfold is integral to how they take shape” and not only because all our thoughts and actions necessarily occur in space.¹⁷ Foucault’s discussions on the significance of space for the human condition are widely recognized as having led to the spatial turn.¹⁸

The key text for understanding Foucault’s concept of heterotopia is his “*Des Espaces Autres*” (variously translated as “Of Other Spaces” and “Different Spaces”), originally delivered as a lecture to architects. There have been earlier, and not in the least insignificant, mentions of the concept by Foucault, such as those in *The Order of Things* and a few radio transcripts of his talks. However, “*Des Espaces Autres*” is the publicly available text wherein the concept is discussed in most detail—though often reprimanded for being too short, unsystematized, and ambiguous. The text has had at least four translations from French to English, with as many as three anthologies dedicated to celebrating the concept’s continuing relevance, significance, and mystique in our contemporary epoch. One of the significant differences among these translations lies in the translator’s interpretation of heterotopia’s stance on difference/alterity—i.e., whether or not heterotopia is a space separate from the spaces of everyday life. This paper refers to the fourth translation of “*Des Espaces Autres*” by Dehaene and De Cauter in 2008, who followed the now-classical convention to translate the title of the text as “Of Other Spaces” to emphasize the separation of heterotopias from spaces of everyday life. In contrast, the third translation of the text by Robert Hurley in 1998 puts forward an alternative translation of the title of the text as

¹⁵ Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis, and Kathryn Gleadle, “Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn,” in *Women’s History Review*, 21 (2012), 526.

¹⁶ Edward Soja, “Taking Space Personally,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Santa Arias and Barney Warf (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 11.

¹⁷ Barney Warf and Santa Arias, “Introduction: Reinsertion of Space in the Humanities and Social Sciences,” in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Santa Arias and Barney Warf (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 3–10; Maria Cristina Vendra and Paolo Furia, “Introduction: Ricœur and the Problem of Space. Perspectives on a Ricœurian ‘Spatial Turn,’” in *Ricœur Studies*, 12 (2021), 1.

¹⁸ Beebe, Davis, and Gleadle, “Space, Place and Gendered Identities,” 525–527.

“Different Spaces” to assert that heterotopias are not “radically other than the spaces of ordinary life.”¹⁹

Foucault considers space a historical entity subject to time and power—its history is a history of powers.²⁰ He begins *“Des Espaces Autres”* with a brief history of the concept of space in the West. According to his account, the contemporary space of “emplacements” has substituted the modern space of “extension,” which itself had replaced the medieval space of “localization.” In the Middle Ages, space was conceptualized as a hierarchic, oppositional ensemble of localized places. However, when space came to be conceived as infinitely extended and open in the modern era, places were dismissed as mere points in the movement of a thing. In contrast, space is conceptualized today as emplacements, i.e., “relations of proximity between points or elements.”²¹ Foucault writes:

The present epoch would perhaps rather be the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity; we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed We do not live in a kind of void, inside which we could place individuals and things We live inside a set of relations that delineate emplacements that cannot be equated or in any way superimposed.²²

In other words, Foucault considers contemporary space to be relational and heterogeneous.

In *“Des Espaces Autres,”* Foucault considers heterotopia as one of the two main types of spaces that have “the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored, or reflected by them.” The other type of space—utopia—is an emplacement with no real place that has “a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. It is society itself perfected, or else it is society turned upside down.” In contrast to utopias that are “fundamentally unreal places,” heterotopias are real places:

¹⁹ Email exchange with James Faubion by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter cited in Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967),” in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. and trans. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter (London: Routledge, 2008), 23n*.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 149.

²¹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 14–16.

There are also, and this probably in all culture, in all civilization, real places, effective places, places that are written into the institution of society itself, and that are a sort of counter-emplacements, a sort of effectively realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted; a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable.²³

The meanings of emplacements can be explored by describing them by looking for the set of relations by which a given site can be defined. Foucault terms the systematic description of heterotopias via the network of relations that define them as “heterotopology.” It has as its object “in a given society, the study, analysis, description, and ‘reading,’ ... of these different spaces, of these other places, as a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.”²⁴

To describe the concept of heterotopia, Foucault provides us with six principles, which we summarize as follows: (1) Heterotopias are constituted in (probably) all cultures in the world, though in varied forms; (2) Each heterotopia has a “precise and determined function” within a society that may change over time; (3) A heterotopia can juxtapose within it several incompatible emplacements; (4) Heterotopias are often linked to “slices of time,” providing “a sort of absolute break with...traditional time”; (5) Heterotopias presuppose “a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable,” through constraint or submission to permissions, rites, or purifications; (6) Heterotopias have a function in relation to the rest of space, be it the exposing of its being illusory or compensating for its disorderliness.²⁵

Despite (or perhaps due to) the description of its principles, heterotopia remains a fluid and fertile concept. Though Foucault himself did not engage further with the concept, it has been kept from being too frozen or sedimented over the years through ongoing debates and disagreements among later theorists regarding its interpretations. These various interpretations can be summarized in terms of their underlying positions by following Hilde Heynen’s framework, bringing them under three key dimensions: i) The role of space (Is heterotopia a recognizable spatial entity? How can the relationship between spatial and social-cultural processes be

²³ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 18–21.

conceptualized?); ii) Aspects of politics (Do heterotopias support or subvert the societal status quo?); and iii) The dynamics of human agency (Do heterotopias have the same meaning for all the actors involved?).²⁶

The possibility or permissibility of interpreting home as heterotopia is partly based on the same unresolved problematic of the concept that underlies the disagreements among the different translations of the title of *“Des Espaces Autres”*: Heterotopia’s stance on difference/alterity, i.e., whether or not it is an other space, separate from the spaces of everyday life. If heterotopia is indeed an other space, the concept as a metaphor will allow its displacement to new situations, i.e., situations outside those mentioned in its original conception by Foucault—such as the situation of home, a space of everyday life. The process of displacement is not an application of the concept of heterotopia to the new situation of home as an instance of it (subsumption or ordering). Instead, it is a taking of the concept as a metaphor for home to transpose or carry over a new perspective to think about the situation.²⁷ The interpretation of home as heterotopia involves the activity of “reading,” i.e., a selecting or screening to “set aside the irrelevant aspects and emphasize only what is relevant”²⁸ in the concept and elaborating how these can be carried over and related to the new situation. In this process, the logical distance between heterotopia and home is reduced—what initially appears remote, and a strange or mistaken use no longer seems so.²⁹

In this section, we have shown that heterotopia is a fluid concept that allows displacement to the new situation of home as a metaphor. Such a displacement opens possibilities for the generation of a new perspective that can be carried over to think about and even overcome the blocked situation of home. To explore this possibility, in the next section, we will describe a Foucauldian “heterotopology of home” that interprets home as heterotopia and suggest that the principles of heterotopia can be carried over and related to the situation of home.

Home as Heterotopia: Describing a Foucauldian Heterotopology of Home

In this section, we will think with Foucault about the classic description of home and the experiences of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* in the context of his relational understanding of space. We will then describe a

²⁶ Hilde Heynen, “Heterotopia Unfolded?,” in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008), 312–321.

²⁷ Ricoeur, “Fiction (4): Models,” 264.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 271.

Foucauldian “heterotopology of home” by summarizing and analyzing past readings of home as heterotopia on the basis of their underlying positions through Hilde Heynen’s framework, which we mentioned in the previous section.

In “*Des Espaces Autres*,” Foucault offers suggestions for thinking about the classic description of home. He observes that even in the contemporary epoch of space, “perhaps our life is still ruled by a certain number of oppositions that cannot be touched, that institution and practice have not yet dared to undermine; oppositions that we regard as simple givens.”³⁰ Home can be considered a space wherein such a “practical desacralization” has not yet occurred.³¹ The notion of home is suspended between the materiality of actually localizable spaces and the human need to be in one’s place. Nevertheless, following Foucault, we can see how there is nothing in the order of the home as such—its structure or function or even the intention behind it—that can either thwart or guarantee the *heimlich* experienced within it.³²

Following the Foucauldian conception of space as relational, we can see that the experiences of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* within home open four scenarios in relation to the rest of space: first, despite the experience of the *heimlich* within home, we may experience the *unheimlich* in the rest of space. Second, despite the experience of the *unheimlich* within home, we may experience the *heimlich* in the rest of space. Third, the experience of the *unheimlich* within home may seep into, stylize, and shape our experiences of and negotiations with the rest of space, haunting us with an uneasiness linked to the feeling of not finding one’s place in the world. Fourth, in cases of absolute privilege, the experience of the *heimlich* is omnipresent, pervading each and every space as we move through the world. As we can see, among these four scenarios, it is the third that most closely relates to our discussion on the situation of home.

In “*Des Espaces Autres*,” Foucault calls the house, the bedroom, and the bed “closed or semi-closed emplacements of rest.”³³ Whether or not these emplacements are necessary or sufficient parts of homes, he neither qualifies

³⁰ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 16.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16 and Ricoeur, “Uncanniness,” 264. See also Lee Quinby, “Resistance on the Home Front: Re(con)figuring Home Space as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 143.

³² Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power,” in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 354–356. By this, Foucault does not mean that the “exercise of freedom is completely indifferent to spatial distribution....” He asserts that architecture “can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom” (Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power,” 355–366).

³³ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 16.

them nor exemplifies homes as heterotopias. In other words, the situation of home lies outside those mentioned in Foucault's original conception of heterotopia. Nevertheless, although the problematic of heterotopia's stance on difference/alterity remains theoretically unresolved, several thinkers over the years have interpreted home as heterotopia in their multiple, often diverging, and even contradictory readings³⁴—affirming our finding that heterotopia can be displaced to the situation of home. The multitude of these past readings of home as heterotopia can be summarized and analyzed on the basis of their underlying positions, following Hilde Heynen's framework, to describe a "heterotopology of home."³⁵

i) *The role of space*: Is home as heterotopia a recognizable spatial entity? On the one hand, reading home with an emphasis on its *spatial form* highlights its heterotopian mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In this reading, the material or structural form of the home is what makes it heterotopian (Foucault's first principle of heterotopia). On the other hand, reading home with an emphasis on its *actual use and meanings* helps envision it as having the quality to temporarily accommodate heterotopian moments within its form.³⁶ Here, heterotopia is a dynamic, ephemeral quality of the lived space of the home, actualized by the practices of its inhabitants (Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia). Both readings provide insights into the "pattern of regular doings" (Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopia)³⁷ and spatial divisions (Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia) of domesticity and socialization. These patterns and divisions aim at "separation, exclusion, control and cleanliness"³⁸ for the home's inhabitants, providing security, privacy, comfort, familiarity, and an either-or understanding of one's and the other's place within society³⁹ (Foucault's sixth principle of heterotopia). However, in their "logics of purity," prohibition, and discrimination, they may sometimes be inexorable, absurd, and othering even to the inhabitants⁴⁰ (Foucault's third principle of heterotopia).

³⁴ For examples, see Quinby, "Resistance on the Home Front"; Jennifer M. Bondy, "Latinas, Heterotopia, and Home: Pedagogies of Gender and Sexuality in *Quinceañera*," in *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 9 (2012); Alice Gonçalves, "Spaces of Resistance: Heterotopia and Dystopia in Toni Morrison's *Home*," in *Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, 3 (2018).

³⁵ Heynen, "Heterotopia Unfolded?" 312–320.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 312–314.

³⁷ Mary Douglas, "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space," in *Social Research*, 58 (Spring 1991), 287.

³⁸ Heynen, "Heterotopia Unfolded?" 313.

³⁹ Sneha Annavarapu, "Home Is Where the Revolution Is," in *Economic & Political Weekly*, 55 (January 2020), 2.

⁴⁰ See Bondy, "Latinas, Heterotopia, and Home."

How is the relationship between spatial and social-cultural processes conceptualized in home as heterotopia? Reading home as a heterotopian *receptor/reflector* renders it a passive role, emphasizing instead social-cultural mechanisms such as “capital movements, labor relationships, discriminatory practices, symbolic transformations, etc.,” the effects of which are felt and registered through various pathways within its space. Reading home as a heterotopian *instrument* presents it as an active “spatial tool for the regulation of behavior, the disciplining of the body or the activation of social interaction” through various techniques of domination and surveillance. Finally, reading home as a heterotopian *stage* for social processes displays both its active and passive roles in making “certain actions and interactions possible or impossible without this influence being decisive for the content [of the actions]”⁴¹ (Foucault’s second and sixth principles of heterotopia).

ii) *Aspects of politics*: Does home as heterotopia support or subvert the societal status quo? On the one hand, reading home with an emphasis on its *immutability* presents it as an instrument of normalization, oppression, violence, and trauma,⁴² the representation and support system for exclusion, patriarchy, gender normativity, and hierarchy.⁴³ On the other hand, reading home with an emphasis on its *fragility and mutability* makes it possible to envision it as a potential site for the contestation and inversion of the normative order, for the practice of resistance, subversion,⁴⁴ transgression, and greater liberation—an “alternative social formation(s) in the making,”⁴⁵ such as a special kind of distributive justice⁴⁶ or a radically “inclusive and egalitarian space where dissent and comradeship thrive”⁴⁷ (Foucault’s second principle of heterotopia). Such readings are insightful in understanding how the sediments of shared tradition, religion, values, practices, artifacts, and memories in a home not only ground its inhabitants and envelop them in a sense of belonging, but also loom larger than the

⁴¹ Heynen, “Heterotopia Unfolded?” 314–315.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴³ Annavarapu, “Home Is Where the Revolution Is,” 2.

⁴⁴ Heynen, “Heterotopia Unfolded?” 317; Jennifer Brant, “Finding Homeplace within Indigenous Literatures: Honoring the Genealogical Legacies of bell hooks and Lee Maracle,” in *Hypatia*, 38 (2023), 46. Brant documents that bell hooks reconceptualizes homeplace in terms of its potential to be a subversive, feminist site of resistance, renewal, and self-recovery, thus overturning the oppressive nature and sexist norms of the domestic space.

⁴⁵ Heynen, “Heterotopia Unfolded?” 318.

⁴⁶ Douglas, “Idea of a Home,” 297.

⁴⁷ Annavarapu, “Home Is Where the Revolution Is,” 2.

inhabitants themselves, exerting “tyrannous control” over mind, body, and speech⁴⁸ (Foucault’s third principle of heterotopia).

iii) *The dynamics of human agency*: Does home as heterotopia have the same meaning for all actors involved? Many feminist readings of home as heterotopia emphasize “the necessity to recognize that embodied subjectivities, decentered and de-totalized as they might be, provide the necessary starting point for a politics of anti-domination.”⁴⁹ They have as their central site of interrogation the contextualized, embodied subjects and their ability to “not only live in, but also act upon and transform” their lived space of home.⁵⁰ These readings also demonstrate that home can be negotiated to have different meanings and functions for different inhabitants based on their subject positions and social relations and that these meanings, functions, and subject positions can shift or multiply over time (Foucault’s second principle of heterotopia).⁵¹

Summing up, in this section, we described a Foucauldian heterotopology of home by summarizing and analyzing the multitude of past readings of home as heterotopia on the basis of their underlying positions through Hilde Heynen’s framework. Rather than providing a new reading of home as heterotopia, we built on past contributions to suggest that the characteristics of home identified in these readings relate to Foucault’s principles of heterotopia. In the next section, we will reflect on this heterotopology of home to account for the experience of the *unheimlich* within home so as to overcome the blocked situation of home.

Describing the *unheimlich* within Home: A Reflection on the Heterotopology of Home

In this section, we will reflect on the Foucauldian heterotopology of home described in the previous section. We will show that describing the experience of the *unheimlich* within home calls for a reinterpretation of the experience of the *heimlich* and the understanding of selfhood in relation to the *unheimlich*. We will put forth Mariana Ortega’s accounts of “hometactics” and “multiplicitous selves” and Georg Simmel’s notion of “the stranger” as exemplifications of such a reinterpretation.

A heterotopology of home urges us to reinterpret the experience of the *heimlich* within home in relation to the *unheimlich*. It emphasizes that the

⁴⁸ Douglas, “Idea of a Home,” 304.

⁴⁹ Heynen, “Heterotopia Unfolded?” 321.

⁵⁰ Bondy, “Latinas, Heterotopia, and Home,” 94.

⁵¹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 18 and *Ibid*.

experience of the *heimlich* within home exists simultaneously and in juxtaposition with the realm of power and its forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion at play in that very space, aligning with Antonsich's argument that place-belongingness should not be separated from the politics of belonging.⁵² Thus, it does justice to both the noetic and the noematic dimensions of the intentionality of the act of perceiving home. By blurring divides such as private/public, personal/social, subjective/objective, and spaces of everyday life/other spaces, a heterotopology of home contributes to ongoing discussions that contest the assumed givenness of the oppositions that Foucault observes as existing even in the contemporary epoch of space.⁵³

The complex and variegated experience of the *heimlich* needs to be articulated in terms of both the personal and the social. Mariana Ortega's account of hometactics can be considered an instance of such an articulation. Ortega notes that in the absence of a pre-given experience of the *heimlich* in the home and to alleviate the experience of the *unheimlich*, selves engage in certain micropractices of home-making to make themselves feel more at home in the world — what she calls "hometactics." Ortega here follows Michel de Certeau's understanding of "tactics" as "the 'art of the weak,' or ingenious, improvised resistant practices performed by those who do not have power,"⁵⁴ which itself, in part, follows Foucault's general approach towards power and distinction between tactics and strategies.⁵⁵ Power, for Foucault, is an actual practice of people rather than an institution or substance that can be possessed. Tactics are local, singular force relations of power that become strategies when coordinated to form an apparatus.⁵⁶ For Foucault, it is in these actual practices of people that resistance is immanent and realized within a totalizing system — the realm in which power is exercised is also the one in which strategies of resistance to it are being developed.⁵⁷ Owing to being contingent, decentered, and personal, hometactics are unmappable and offer no surety on "how effective such practices will be, how they can be co-opted, misunderstood, or undermined by others."⁵⁸ Examples of hometactics

⁵² Antonsich, "Searching for Belonging," 645.

⁵³ The assumed divide and opposition between private and public spaces has been heavily criticized, especially by feminist theorists. For a detailed discussion, see Quinby, "Resistance on the Home Front."

⁵⁴ Ortega, "Hometactics," 169.

⁵⁵ John Nale, "Strategies (and Tactics)," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 488.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁵⁷ Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, Power," 354–356 and Nale, "Strategies (and Tactics)," 488.

⁵⁸ Ortega, "Hometactics," 173.

include arranging things in a space to evoke a sense of familiarity and walking in a city without a map. The *heimlich* forged through hometactics is neither normative (at ease with intelligibility, norms, and practices), authentic (given fully due to one's identity), or pure (normative, authentic, and without the possibility of rupture). Instead, it is a belonging-in-the-making that "'makes do' and is creatively constructed in our everyday dealings in worlds."⁵⁹ Borrowing Ricoeur's vocabulary, hometactics can be read as an "appropriation" of the experience of the *unheimlich*—a "play" through which what had been other is made one's own or familiar.⁶⁰

A heterotopology of home also enriches our understanding of selfhood by proposing the productive function that the experience of the *unheimlich* within home can have in self-constitution and self-understanding. Since the spatial turn, the fixed, unified, autonomous, and transcendental identity at the core of the Cogito has more decisively made way to account for heterogenous, shifting, and even contradictory aspects of the nature and constitution of selves who lie at the "changing intersections of different language games" and axes of identity.⁶¹ Ortega's account of "multiplicitous selves" is an instance of such a shift in understanding selfhood. In her vocabulary, the self that engages in hometactics is "multiplicitous," one that "occupies multiple positionalities in terms of social identities...and thus lives in various worlds."⁶² The lived experiences of multiplicitous selves that are marginalized are of ruptures and being constantly aware of not being at home in the worlds they inhabit. They must then constantly engage in traveling in and between their worlds,⁶³ an activity that redefines the search for home as a question of homes, one's home-boundedness, i.e., the longing to come home, and what we come to call home or our place in the world.⁶⁴

However, this "tactical" activity runs the risk of what Ricoeur warns us about constantly placing and displacing oneself: "It is always possible,

⁵⁹ Ortega, "Hometactics," 170.

⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "The Canon between the Text and the Community," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. by Petr Pokorný and Jan Roskovec (Tübingen: Mohn Siebeck, 2002), 12 and Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. by John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 147.

⁶¹ Warf and Arias, "Reinsertion of Space in the Humanities and Social Sciences," 6.

⁶² Mariana Ortega, "Hometactics: Self-Mapping, Belonging, and the Home Question," in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. by Emily S. Lee (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 170–171.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Here, one may recall the different notions of "world" such as "*Heimwelt*" (home-world), "*Fremdwelt*" (foreign-world), and "*Allwelt*" (the whole-world) in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.

often urgent, to displace oneself at the risk of becoming that passerby, that wanderer, that *flâneur*, that vagabond, stray dog that our fragmented contemporary culture both sets in motion and paralyzes.”⁶⁵ Although this risk anticipated by Ricoeur is an actual possibility, our discussion of the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia as a metaphor offers mitigatory suggestions following Georg Simmel’s notion of “the stranger.” In traveling in and between worlds, the stranger exercises her “freedom of coming and going.” Her position in the group she has come to today and will stay until the morrow is “determined, essentially, by the fact that [s]he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that [s]he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself.”⁶⁶ Then, akin to the concept of metaphor, the stranger generates new perspectives that can be transposed to think about the experience of the *unheimlich* and to help constitute the self through the forged *heimlich*.

In brief, in this section, we have shown that a reflection on the heterotopology of home opens space for contesting the myths of humanity deposited in tradition and culture, as well as critiquing the illusions and prejudices of the self. It generates a perspective to describe the experience of the *unheimlich* at home by reinterpreting the experience of the *heimlich* and the understanding of selfhood in relation to the *unheimlich*. We illustrated the possibility of such a reinterpretation by invoking Ortega’s accounts of “hometactics” and “multiplicitous selves” and Simmel’s notion of the “the stranger.” We observe that Ortega’s notion of forged belonging aligns with the Foucauldian intuition that the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* are actual experiences within a space, not states or conditions given or guaranteed through the material or structural form of the space. Although the reinterpretation we propose is not without the risks anticipated by Ricoeur, we indicated that Simmel’s notion of the stranger offers decisive suggestions to mitigate them. Ultimately, this reflection provides further evidence that, although Foucault himself did not engage further with heterotopia, the concept is so fluid and fertile that it continues to generate meanings, not only through displacement to new situations but also through engagement with diverse thoughts and thinkers.

Conclusion: Overcoming the Blocked Situation

A Foucauldian heterotopology of home overcomes the blocked situation of home as the experience of the *unheimlich* within home becomes

⁶⁵ Ricoeur, “Inhabited Space,” 149.

⁶⁶ Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. by Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 402.

describable in terms of the new description of home as heterotopia. In this process, along with transforming the perception of home, a heterotopology of home also transforms the previous description of heterotopia. The displacement of the concept of heterotopia to the situation of home results in the extension of its instances from “other spaces” to spaces of everyday life, modifying its conceptual scheme. In other words, heterotopia is a different space, not an other space. Our interpretation of the heterotopology of home thus contributes to discussions on the problematic of difference/alterity surrounding heterotopias by reasserting the relationality of space advocated by Foucault and suggested by the notion of difference.

*School of Sanskrit, Philosophy and Indic Studies
Goa University, Goa, India*

References

- Annavarapu, Sneha, “Home Is Where the Revolution Is,” in *Economic & Political Weekly*, 55 (January 2020).
- Antonsich, Marco, “Searching for Belonging: An Analytical Framework,” in *Geography Compass*, 4 (2010).
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 23 (Spring 1997).
- Beebe, Kathrynne, Angela Davis, and Kathryn Gleadle, “Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn,” in *Women’s History Review*, 21 (2012).
- Bondy, Jennifer M., “Latinas, Heterotopia, and Home: Pedagogies of Gender and Sexuality in *Quinceañera*,” in *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 9 (2012).
- Brant, Jennifer, “Finding Homeplace within Indigenous Literatures: Honoring the Genealogical Legacies of bell hooks and Lee Maracle,” in *Hypatia*, 38 (2023).
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, “The Home as Symbolic Environment,” in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, ed. by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- D’Angelo, Diego, “To Be or Not to Be at Home. Heidegger and Derrida Reading Sophocles,” in *Kritike*, 14 (2021).
- Donohoe, Janet, “The Place of Home,” in *Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology*, 23 (Spring 2012).
- Douglas, Mary, “The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space,” in *Social Research*, 58 (Spring 1991).

- Foucault, Michel, "Of Other Spaces (1967)," in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. and trans. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008).
- _____, "Space, Knowledge, Power," in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000).
- _____, "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
- Gonçalves, Alice, "Spaces of Resistance: Heterotopia and Dystopia in Toni Morrison's *Home*," in *Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, 3 (2018).
- Heynen, Hilde, "Heterotopia Unfolded?" in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (London: Routledge, 2008).
- Nale, John, "Strategies (and Tactics)," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- Ortega, Mariana, "Hometactics," in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020).
- _____, "Hometactics: Self-Mapping, Belonging, and the Home Question," in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race*, ed. by Emily S. Lee (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014).
- Quinby, Lee, "Resistance on the Home Front: Re(con)figuring Home Space as a Practice of Freedom," in *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- Ricoeur, Paul, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. by John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- _____, "Fiction (4): Models," in *Lectures on Imagination*, ed. by George H. Taylor, Robert D. Sweeney, Jean-Luc Amalric, and Patrick F. Cosby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2024).
- _____, "Inhabited Space," in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).
- _____, "The Canon between the Text and the Community," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. by Petr Pokorny and Jan Roskovec (Tubingen: Mohn Siebeck, 2002).
- _____, "Uncanniness Many Times Over," in *Philosophical Anthropology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

- Simmel, Georg, "The Stranger," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. by Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950).
- Soja, Edward, "Taking Space Personally," in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Santa Arias and Barney Warf (London: Taylor and Francis, 2008).
- Tharakan, Koshy and Payel Chattopadhyay Mukherjee, "At Home as an 'Outsider': Subarnalata and Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side," in *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 7 (2022), <<https://doi.org/10.53007/SJGC.2022.V7.I2.47>>.
- Vendra, Maria Cristina and Paolo Furia, "Introduction: Ricœur and the Problem of Space. Perspectives on a Ricœurian 'Spatial Turn,'" in *Ricœur Studies*, 12 (2021).
- Warf, Barney and Santa Arias, "Introduction: Reinsertion of Space in the Humanities and Social Sciences," in *Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2009).

Article

The Courage to Think: What the Legacy of St. Catherine of Alexandria Means Today

Jovito V. Cariño

Abstract: This piece is the text of the lecture delivered at an academic forum held last November 25, 2024 on the occasion of the feast day of St. Catherine of Alexandria. The event was organized by the Faculty of Philosophy Students' Forum under the auspices of the Faculty of Philosophy of the UST Ecclesiastical Faculties. As the title suggests, the talk focuses on the "courage to think," a virtue closely identified with St. Catherine of Alexandria. In my remarks, I identified three possible areas where the "courage to think" may be practiced today, namely, the life of the mind, truth-telling and the act of believing. The three areas do not exhaust the possibilities where the virtue of "courage to think" may be demonstrated but they represent the normative domains closest to the experience of the young seminarians and aspiring apprentices of philosophy in the audience. The selection and identification of the said areas also serve as a reminder for potential readers of the need to discover new ways of appropriating the legacy of St. Catherine of Alexandria.

Keywords: St. Catherine of Alexandria, courage, philosophy, virtue

In this paper, I wish to dwell on the virtue of courage vis-à-vis the practice of philosophy against the backdrop of the commemoration of the legacy of St. Catherine of Alexandria¹ which happily coincides with the observance of World Philosophy Day. Courage in relation to philosophy is an

¹ St. Catherine of Alexandria (287–305) is the patroness of the Faculty of Philosophy and the second patroness of the University of Santo Tomas, after St. Thomas Aquinas himself. She is revered as probably the first Christian woman philosopher and the first Christian woman intellectual martyr. See also Gregory Sadler, "Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Patroness of Christian Philosophers, Inspiration for Contemporary Christian Philosophy?" in *The Alexandrian*, 1: 1 (2007), 1–13; John Capgrave, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, trans. by Karen A. Winstead (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

imposing topic, hence my decision to take it up in a tangential manner. In other words, rather than discuss courage directly, I would dwell on situations or circumstances which require courage and on personalities who could be taken as exemplars of courage. In doing so, hopefully, I could show that no two acts of courage are the same and that individuals display their courage differently. It would have been easier if I were to talk of courage as a generic act of heroism. But the theme of the gathering requires me to talk about a specific kind of courage, that is, courage as a virtue in doing philosophy. This specie of courage has less to do with the courage of combat soldiers in the battlefield or the courage of Marvel heroes scouring the multiverse for the lost infinity stones and more in common with the kind of courage which crowned the life and memory of St. Catherine of Alexandria² or led Boethius to write, *The Consolation of Philosophy*,³ in his last days or inspired the character of Winston Smith in George Orwell's *1984*⁴ to push back against the machinations of his political masters. It is also akin to the courage of Maria Ressa⁵ or Leila de Lima⁶ who endured yet survived various measures of persecution employed against them by the Duterte regime to harass them and ultimately silence them, so the public and the world wouldn't know the kind of evil they were up against. In itself, the topic of courage is daunting enough. But to talk of courage vis-à-vis philosophy is a different terrain as one is not simply looking for a triumphant hero. Courage blended with critical thought could in fact make one, ironically, an anti-hero, as in the fates of Socrates⁷ and Aristotle⁸ who were villified by the Athenians or St. Thomas Aquinas who was condemned for dabbling in Greek and Islamic philosophies⁹ or Apolinario Mabini who was isolated for his vocal dissent against the political posturing of the leaders of the incipient Philippine republic¹⁰ or St. Catherine

² Capgrave, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, 141–175.

³ See Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by David R. Slavitt, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴ See George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 2023).

⁵ See Maria Ressa, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2022).

⁶ See Leila de Lima, "How I Survived 2,454 Days in Arbitrary Detention," in *Amnesty International* (20 March 2024), <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2024/03/leila-de-lima-philippines/>>.

⁷ See Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, Hugh Tredennick & Harold Tarrant (New York: Penguin Books, 1993); see also I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

⁸ Carlo Natali, *Aristotle: His Life and School* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 60–64.

⁹ James Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 331–350.

¹⁰ Apolinario Mabini, *La Revolucion Filipina: The Political Writings of Apolinario Mabini*, Vol. 1 (1898–1899) (Manila: The National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2022), 66; Cesar

of Alexandria who was martyred for her staunch allegiance to Christian faith.¹¹ I shall describe this kind of courage in three themes, or should I say, three domains which show the compelling need for the courage to think, to wit, *the life of the mind*, *truth-telling* and *the act of believing*. By focusing on these domains, hopefully, I can provide a picture of what the courage to think entails.

On The Life of the Mind

I will take up the theme of the life of the mind taking into consideration the contemporary crisis of thought. Briefly, I describe the crisis of thought as a steady decline of our practice of and appreciation for thinking.¹² I refer to it as crisis although if one looks around, it would appear as if there is no crisis at all. If indeed there were a crisis, it would probably be a crisis mainly among the intellectuals and academics¹³ whose relevance and impact have been significantly eroded by influencers and content creators who are now the acknowledged gurus directing the subject matter, flow and direction of public opinion within the cyber realm.¹⁴ These new masters are aided (or should I say, lorded over) by another set of experts whose job is to keep the traffic of information continuously mobile and accelerated through the infinite combinations of algorithms that are constantly created and deployed in an ever circulating digital stream. Thanks to these strings of numbers, we can exchange messages and paste emojis, deliver classes online, binge-watch on Netflix, catch up on the latest Tiktok craze, buy cheap wares on Facebook marketplace plus a host of other things that we do in this brave, new world, which took only less than a decade to radically and completely migrate online. Once upon a time, the boundary between online and offline still made sense. Today, one can no longer think of an instance that is in fact completely offline in as much as, to borrow the expression of Yuval Harari,

Adib Majul, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), 217–221.

¹¹ Capgrave, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, 99–140.

¹² Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingering*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017), 38–41; Byung-Chul Han, *Vita Contemplativa: In Praise of Inactivity*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2024), 18–19; and Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 115–148.

¹³ Brie Lee, “Are Influencers The New Public Intellectuals?” (14 March 2024) <<https://www.elle.com.au/culture/are-influencers-the-new-public-intellectuals/>> and Steven Mintz, “More Than Sound Bites: Reclaiming the role of public intellectuals in the age of social media,” (20 February 2025), <<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/2025/02/20/reclaiming-role-public-intellectuals-social-media-age>>.

¹⁴ See Sara McCorquodale, *Influence: How Social Media Influencers are Shaping Our Digital Future* (New York: Bloomsbury Business, 2020).

“the network is always on.”¹⁵ Almost everyone, it seems, wittingly or unwittingly, is simply online.¹⁶ In the former times, a usual day was partitioned into episodes of distinct engagements. Breakfast was not interrupted by anything. Running errands was a bracketed task. Doing homework was a secluded moment. Shared family meal was a sacred rite. In the present age, all these activities are flattened in a singular simultaneity, along with other online interfaces happening in one seamless digital present.¹⁷ One is online the rest of the day until the rest of the night and the only threat that one imagines with mortal dread is the fear of becoming disconnected. Every digital native abides by the conviction that, “I click, therefore, I am.” To paraphrase the words of both the philosopher Mary Midgley¹⁸ and Pope Benedict XVI,¹⁹ ours today is a mathematized world whose impact extends to the inner regions of various knowledge domains including philosophy.²⁰ What we are seeing today is the fulfillment of a vision once dreamed of by Plato²¹ and revived by Descartes:²² a world defined and designed on the foundation of mathematics. With mathematics setting the tone, the goal was to re-create the world according to the rules of calculation, clarity and speed, free from the contamination of the arbitrary sway of human whims or caprices and the margin of error reduced either to a small percentage or none at all. That was the aim. Neither Plato nor Descartes, however, anticipated that mathematics could be a weapon of mass deception as shown by the election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 (documented in the report *Architects of Networked Disinformation*²³) or the election of Ferdinand

¹⁵ Yuval Harari, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*, (New York: Random House, 2024), 338.

¹⁶ Adam Greenfield, *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2018), 31–62.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 65.

¹⁸ Mary Midgley, *What is Philosophy For?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 129–137.

¹⁹ Pope Benedict XVI. “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,” (12 September 2006), 5–6, <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.pdf>

²⁰ Gian-Carlo Rota, “The Pernicious Influence of Mathematics upon Philosophy” in *Synthese*, 88:2 (Aug. 1991), 165–178. See also Andrew Hacker, *The Math Myth and Other STEM Delusions* (New York: The New Press, 2016).

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 47a–b in Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. by Robin Waterfield, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²² Rene Descartes, “Fifth Meditation,” *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47 and 51.

²³ Jonathan Corpus Ong and John Vincent A. Cabañes, “Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines,” (February 2018), <<https://newtontechfordev.com/wp->

Marcos, Jr. in the year 2022²⁴ or the victory of the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, also in the year 2016.²⁵ They also did not foresee how mathematics via algorithmic permutations could alter (as it does today) the notion of what is real via the application of artificial intelligence. Plato would probably turn in his grave once he learns that the “world of forms” he conjured and expounded has been displaced today by the sphere of metrics as the supreme paradigm of what is now taken as “real.”²⁶ What counts today as true, good and beautiful is contingent no longer on any metaphysical or moral or epistemological norm but mainly on algorithmic sequences designed to determine what ranks higher and what does not based on the most effective combinations of digits.²⁷ The academia, for example, no longer subscribes, as its goal and measure, to the idea of a university espoused by Cardinal Newman²⁸ but to a set of metrical indexes imposed by ranking, accrediting or auditing bodies.²⁹ Schools who get the right numbers earn the distinction of being top performers. Academic excellence has become a contest for numbers rather than an engagement in sustained cultivation of scholarship and social responsibility. The only thing that seems to matter now is to be on top by piling up scores and ratings regardless of how the numbers are configured or how or where they are extracted or sourced.³⁰ The same proclivity is passed on by the same schools to their faculty members who

content/uploads/2018/02/ARCHITECTS-OF-NETWORKED-DISINFORMATION-FULL-REPORT.pdf>.

²⁴ Raisha Jesmin, “The Age of Disinformation: How Online Media Propelled the Son of A Former Dictator to Power in the Philippines and what It Means for Democracy,” in *Human Rights Pulse* (27 May 2022), <<https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-age-of-disinformation-how-online-media-propelled-the-son-of-a-former-dictator-to-power-in-the-philippines-and-what-it-means-for-democracy>> and Merinette Retona, “Marcos benefited most from election-related disinfo in 2021,” in *Vera Files* (28 December 2021), <<https://verafilms.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-yearender-marcos-jr-benefited-most-ele>>.

²⁵ Hannah Marshall and Alena Drieschova, “Post-Truth Politics in the UK’s Brexit Referendum,” in *New Perspectives*, 26:3, (2018), 89–105.

²⁶ Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, 65–69. See also David J. Chalmers, “Reality” in *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023).

²⁷ Harari, *Nexus*, 308–314.

²⁸ See John Henry Cardinal Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1992).

²⁹ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018), 67–87.

³⁰ See Bomen Guillermo, “Ang ISI at ang Alamat ng Internasyonal na Komunidad ng mga Syentista,” in *Asian Studies*, 36:2 (January 2020), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306111992_Ang_ISI_at_ang_Alatam_ng_Internasyonal_na_Komunidad_ng_mga_Syentista> and David Michael M. San Juan, “A Critique of Scopus-Centrism in Philippine Universities and Educational and/or Research Agencies: Why Filipinos Should Write Research in Filipino,” in *Humanities Diliman*, 21:2 (July–December 2024), 133–171. See also Michelle Stack, *Global University Rankings and the Mediatization of Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

have been habituated to look at teaching as a point-earning venture.³¹ In their course plans and researches, they are expected to turn in points which are now considered as primary indicators for measuring the performance of students and theirs. We now call teaching, “course delivery” and learning, “academic performance” to highlight the imperative for such activities to produce quantifiable outcomes which, needless to say, are set in numbers. No wonder most students today think of coming to school in terms of accumulating the numeric results they aim at getting, that is, grades. Since learning is a mere performance, they make it a point to bring their A-game and “perform” accordingly.³² And with that mindset, they commonly fall prey to the illusion that keeping up appearances of “excellence” is excellence enough. This is no different from a government official for whom public service means public display of its semblance for the sake of the keenly sought social media mileage. What is missing, in other words, is the students’ real immersion in the rigors of the discipline. There is hardly no real oral engagement happening inside the classroom. Their written outputs too are often mere derivations from some random websites. Education, after all, so they assume, is a mere performance, which often is reckoned as going through the motions of learning. It does not help that the same is seen by them in their mentors who also “perform” teaching as a mere routine, following the cue from the school honchos themselves who value points and numeric indicators more than anything. Bottom line, education has become a repetition of cycle of excellence turned upside down, all because of our fixation with numbers at the expense of actual teaching and learning or should I say, the actual life of the mind. In what way then can one demonstrate the courage to think in this scenario? The courage to think begins when one identifies where we are right now as a problem and confronts it as a problem. Our identity as human persons was once described by Aristotle³³ and St. Thomas Aquinas³⁴ in terms of thinking. Our nature compels us to think and our common destiny as a human community is also bound with our ability to think.³⁵ This is the ability that we are now all too willing to

³¹ See for example, Mary Evans, *Killing Thinking: The Death of Universities* (London: Continuum, 2004), 29–47.

³² Eleanor Pinugu, “The costs of a grade-obsessed mindset,” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (27 May 2024), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/173989/the-costs-of-a-grade-obsessed-mindset>>.

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1098a in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, <<https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>>. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, art. 1, reply 11, <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeAnima.htm>>.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. 1, 1235a25–35 in Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by CDC Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998); Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, q. 90, art.2; *De Regno*, I.1,8.

concede to its simulacra. The crisis referred to at the beginning of this paper could become more acute if we keep ourselves deluded by the “myth” of the innovations of human thought when human thought itself is held captive by the electronic artifacts of its own making, electronic artifacts that are intended and crafted to provoke and stimulate thought to its barest minimum.³⁶ The banality of evil coincides with our failure to think, says Hannah Arendt.³⁷ And that banality grows twice as worse when the same failure, rather than being called as it is, is construed otherwise. It takes courage to realize that the phenomenon staring us right now, to borrow the description of Theodor Adorno, mirrors a severely “damaged life.”³⁸ And it becomes doubly damaged when we see and hear people (particularly those who should know better) persist in denying or simply refusing to acknowledge the tragic state we have brought ourselves into.

On Truth-telling

Since time immemorial, truth-telling (along with truth-seeking) has always been a thorny and burdensome undertaking. The Gospels assure us that truth will set us free, although for Oedipus, it meant the unmasking of his tragic end. He ventured to seek the truth and eventually found it, along with the curse that befell his family and himself.³⁹ Today, truth is yet again at stake as the war between Israel and Hamas ravages places like Gaza and Lebanon. Our sympathies are torn between one side and the other knowing how difficult it is to discern the markers that would clearly delineate the aggressor from the aggrieved.⁴⁰ Almost daily we are also feted with the spectacle of the grand truth-hunting staged by the Philippine Senate and the House of Representatives on various issues ranging from POGO,⁴¹ human

³⁶ Frank Furedi, *Wasted: Why education is not educating*, (London: Continuum, 2009), 22–42. See also Justin E.H. Smith, “It’s All Over,” in *The Web* (3 January 2019), <<https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/its-all-over/>>.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 49. See also Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 159.

³⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso Books, 2005), 15–18.

³⁹ Sophocles, “Oedipus The King” in Hadas, Moses (ed.) *Greek Drama. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 111–149.

⁴⁰ Slavoj Zizek, “Israel-Palestine conflict: Who is to blame?,” in *The New Statesman* (19 October 2023), <<https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/10/israel-palestine-blame>> and Alexander Gale, “Narrative Warfare: Competitive Victimhood in the Israel-Gaza Conflict,” in *Modern Diplomacy* (19 November 2023), <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/11/19/narrative-warfare-competitive-victimhood-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>>.

⁴¹ Dominique Nicole Flores, “Roundup: What was revealed in House quadcom hearing on POGOs,” in *The Philippine Star* (6 September 2024),

trafficking and other criminal activities of Pastor Apollo Quiboloy,⁴² the extra-judicial killings under the Duterte regime⁴³ and the questionable expenditures of the Department of Education⁴⁴ and the Office of the Vice-President.⁴⁵ The public is supposed to gain something from this kind of legislative proceeding but given the partisan nature of the hearings, not to mention the personalities and the characters involved, it is hard to tell whether the truth they claim to be pursuing will ultimately serve the cause of justice and not merely the political advantage of the inquiring legislators most of whom are just too eager to hog the limelight in aid of re-election.⁴⁶ Surely the public deserves to know the truth but once mishandled, the same truth could swiftly turn into a mere lip service.

Truth is not meant to be instrumentalized. It cannot be subordinated to an agendum or advocacy purported to be higher than itself. St. Thomas tells us that truth should be sought for its own sake.⁴⁷ It serves as the

<<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/06/2383319/rundown-what-was-revealed-house-quadcom-hearing-pogos>> and Marc Jason Cayabyab, "Senate to hold last POGO hearing next week," in *The Philippine Star* (22 November 2024), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/11/22/2402091/senate-hold-last-pogo-hearing-next-week>>.

⁴² Karen de Guzman, "Quiboloy faces Senate probe on alleged trafficking, sexual abuses," in *ABS-CBN News*, (23 October 2024), <<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/10/23/quiboloy-faces-senate-probe-on-alleged-trafficking-sexual-abuses-917>>.

⁴³ Rowegie Abanto, "Duterte sits beside De Lima at House quad comm inquiry," in *ABS-CBN News* (13 November 2024), <<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/11/13/duterte-sits-beside-de-lima-at-house-quad-comm-inquiry-1102>> and RG Cruz, "Duterte statements at Senate probe can be used to file cases: Escudero, Diokno," in *ABS-CBN News* (29 October 2024), <<https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/10/29/duterte-statements-at-senate-probe-can-be-used-to-file-cases-escudero-diokno-1442>>.

⁴⁴ Charie Abarca, "Hontiveros wants Senate probe into Duterte-led DepEd's secret fund," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (3 September 2024), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1979620/hontiveros-wants-senate-probe-into-depeds-2023-confidential-fund>> and Cristina Chi, "House hearing surfaces conflicting claims on DepEd's confidential funds for 'leadership summits,'" in *The Philippine Star* (17 October 2024), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/10/17/2393266/house-hearing-surfaces-conflicting-claims-depeds-confidential-funds-leadership-summits>>.

⁴⁵ Llanesca T. Panti, "4 subpoenaed OVP employees finally attend House hearing," in *GMA News Online* (25 November 2024), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/928062/ovp-employees-house-budget-use-probe/story/>>.

⁴⁶ Dwight de Leon, "Test of popularity: Who are the quad committee members with opponents in 2025?," in *Rappler* (26 February 2025), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/elections/list-quad-committee-lawmakers-running-against-opponents-2025-midterms/>>.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, 1.2, <<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraGentiles1.htm>>.

overarching goal of what he refers to as ‘the office of the wise man.’⁴⁸ In effect, he is saying in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* that the quest for truth is itself a demonstration of the love of wisdom.⁴⁹ Unfortunately for us, this organic unity between truth and philosophy, or any domain of knowledge for that matter, has been severely undermined by post-modernity. While modernity previously held that truth was restricted to human subjectivity or categories of reason, post-modernity radically changed this worldview by dissolving any notion of truth via its renunciation of the efficacy of human reason itself.⁵⁰ Post-modernity, in a sense, may also be described as post-objectivity because of its partiality to a rigidly perspectival or relativist rationality.⁵¹ This stance runs counter to what St. Thomas shows in *Summa Contra Gentiles* where he extols human rational aptitude in relation to truth-seeking and truth-telling that go beyond the confines of parochial relativism.⁵² The dominant cultural and intellectual consequences of post-modernity induce most people today to give up on truth. Lectures or books abound as well from prominent scholars who suggest that truth has gone out of fashion.⁵³ What adds another layer of complexity to the already tortuous matter of truth-seeking and truth-telling is the prevailing oversimplification of our understanding of truth. Most of the time, we take the question of truth as simply a matter either of affirmation or denial. Those in the affirmative side, convinced that they are on the side of truth, assume that finding it is as easy as selecting one’s favorite merchandise in Lazada or Shopee. They do not feel compelled at all to examine truth and its surprising epiphanies; they take truth to be monadic, gratuitous and exclusive. Those who relate to truth in this manner also think that its preservation and articulation is a birthright and privilege bestowed on them by their religious, political, cultural or disciplinal identities. They consider others with alternate voices as outliers of what they take to be the “truth.” On the other end of the spectrum, those who deny truth do not seem to realize as well the contradiction inherent in their denial. They take it for granted that one cannot offer a truth-claim, in this case, the denial of truth, while denying truth at the same time. Their error reminds us why Aristotle

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, 1.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, 2.

⁵⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27–29.

⁵¹ Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2003), 22–32 and 70–72.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, 3

⁵³ See, for example, Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

treats the principle of non-contradiction as the *sine qua non* for making any philosophic statement worthy of itself.⁵⁴ The question of truth, in other words, will not be settled by mere intuitive affirmation or crass negation. There are occasions when championing truth can lead to its ambiguities just as sometimes its denial can help disclose truth in clearer light. There is truth, for example, in saying that Christianity must have a place in politics but to claim that Christianity finds its best representative in Donald Trump seems to be a distortion rather than a validation of truth.⁵⁵ There is also truth in the advocacy to eliminate drug addiction in the country but to argue that murder is the key to achieving this goes against the basic sense either of truth or justice.⁵⁶ The same may be said about the negation of truth. In *Noli Me Tangere*⁵⁷ as in his other writings,⁵⁸ Jose Rizal refuted the colonial notion of religion but in so doing, he managed to introduce an alternative way of looking at religion that was more expressive of the Filipinos' moral and religious consciousness.⁵⁹ Nietzsche likewise declared the death of God.⁶⁰ His statement was disconcerting and scandalous to many but it was the same pronouncement that called our attention to how religious attitudes and practices can become, sometimes, the very thing that renders God lifeless.⁶¹ The courage to think demands us to be conscious, cautious and critical of the hidden possibilities involved in affirming and negating truth. It turns out that neither a ready affirmation nor a quick negation could help us achieve this.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Gamma, 1005b1–25 in Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016).

⁵⁵ See Helgard Muller, *President Donald Trump: The Son of Man—The Christ*, (Colorado: Outskirts Press, 2022); see also Matthew D. Taylor, “The second coming of Donald J. Trump,” in *New Humanist* (13 February 2025), <<https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/6380/the-second-coming-of-donald-j-trump>> and Aleem Maqbool, “‘Anointed by God’: The Christians who see Trump as their saviour,” in *BBC News* (17 November 2024), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20g1zvqj4do>>.

⁵⁶ Randy David, “A truth commission on Duterte’s war on drugs,” in *randydavid.com* (22 September 2024), <<https://www.randydavid.com/2024/09/a-truth-commission-on-dutertes-war-on-drugs/>>.

⁵⁷ Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere*, trans. by Harold Augenbraum (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁵⁸ Jose Rizal, *Political and Historical Writings (Volume VII)* (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1996).

⁵⁹ Raul J. Bonoan, (ed.) *The Rizal-Pastells Correspondence: The Hitherto Unpublished Letters of Jose Rizal and Portions of Fr. Pablo Pastell’s Fourth Letter and Translation of the Correspondence Together with a Historical Background and Theological Critique*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994). See also John Nery, “Rizal as Catholic,” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (20 December 2014), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/81338/rizal-as-catholic>>.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109, 119–120, and 199.

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Adrian del Caro, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 212–214.

In fact, the mistaken notion that truth can be conveniently acquired by sheer affirmation or be casually negated by a candid rejection is what leads us to where we are right now: the age of post-truth. The culture of post-truth highlights our inability to recognize the complex nature of truth and our credulity to mistake truth for something else. We become helpless targets of various forms of misinformation because we ourselves often take for granted the imperative to be critical and reasonable. We equate truth with facts, information, social media content or data, unmindful of how these things can be manufactured or manipulated by those who can pay more and gain even more by paying. The courage to think, then, in relation to truth-telling, compels us to be assertive of the rational dimension of our being human and to engage truth in its multi-faceted unity. We need to realize that truth may appear in strangest ways; it may convey itself in the guise of a problem or question and not, as we usually expect, in a clearly spelled out pronouncement. He who thinks that truth always comes to us with a flashy and glittering label is missing the point. Part of truth's authenticity is its simplicity but being simple does not mean simplistic. The need therefore to pay attention to truth, disclosed or otherwise, with as much patience and care, cannot be overstated. This is all the more necessary when one talks of God who, as the simplest of all truths, always exceeds the grasp of human mind.

On the Act of Believing

In saying that God is the simplest truth that exceeds the capacity of human mind, I do not mean that God is a mere thought content unattainable by our rational capacity. On the contrary, God as the simplest truth suggests that he is what kindles the mind only to elude it at the very moment of such encounter.⁶² God can be thought but only in his faint semblance or be identified albeit in his hazy, distant traces.⁶³ This ordeal is captured by the *Song of Songs*' depiction of the lover's ceaseless search for the beloved who is constantly out of sight: "All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him."⁶⁴ The same torment that comes with meeting God in his absence was once described by St. John of the Cross as "the dark night."⁶⁵ St. John of the Cross' dark night is Jonah's

⁶² Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, "Sermon One," trans. by Maurice O'C. Walshe, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 33–34.

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.q.13.a.1–3.

⁶⁴ Song of Songs, 3:1–2, NIV.

⁶⁵ St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Book I, Chapter VIII., trans. by E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 2005), 62–64.

three days in the belly of the whale⁶⁶ and Moses' desert crossing to Mt. Sinai.⁶⁷ Peter, John and James underwent the same bittersweet experience of finding God in his unfinding at Mt. Tabor where they thought they had a divine sighting through the thick clouds that blocked their view.⁶⁸ One may also recall the tale shared by the two disciples at Emmaus who realized they had seen the risen Christ in the instant he vanished after conversing and breaking bread with them.⁶⁹

The references above somehow give us snippets of what goes with the act of believing. It involves struggles and ones that are intense, lifelong and consistent. Other than the need to keep the fight and finish the race, one must also struggle against his own frailty, against the natural tendency of the human will to yield and to run towards the quickest way out when the odds are stronger. While self-mastery is not an impossible task, its attainment is found among individuals who are rather rare and few. Aside from the figures already cited, one may also count among them the likes of St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and St. Catherine of Alexandria herself. We consider them heroes of faith for in their actions and their entire life stories, they served as authentic models of witnessing. In their triumphs and failures, they championed the cause of faith and in a very special way, showed us why it takes a huge amount of courage to believe. The catechism plainly teaches that faith is an intellectual assent⁷⁰ but it does not really detail the hazards and risks involved when one commits himself to believe. For in real life, intellectual assent is but a tiny portion of the act of faith. More than intellectual assent, believing also requires character formation, moral commitment, living in communion, acts of service, promotion of justice and peace and perfection of charity among others.⁷¹ The trickiest part of believing, however, comes with believing against belief itself. At one point, one needs to believe against belief in order to make room for authentic faith. To be worthy of Yahweh's promise, Abraham had to believe against the belief he might lose his only son.⁷² To turn over a new leaf, the Samaritan woman had to believe against the belief her life was but one redundant sad story.⁷³ To be free from her past, the accused adulteress had to believe against the belief that she did not deserve to be forgiven.⁷⁴ Believing

⁶⁶ Jonah 1:17–2:10, *NIV*.

⁶⁷ Exodus 15:22–20:21.

⁶⁸ Matthew 17:1–11.

⁶⁹ Luke 24:13–33.

⁷⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 155.

⁷¹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae and IIaIIae.

⁷² Genesis 22:1–19.

⁷³ John 4:1–26.

⁷⁴ John 8:1–11.

against belief, however, is not for the faint-hearted. Only those who have the gumption to face the unforeseeable can believe against belief and, hence, prove one's openness to faith. Faith may truly be inconvenient and exacting and the amount of uncertainty it involves may be too overwhelming which makes turning away from God or abandonment of faith an appealing alternative for some. They find it hard to come to terms with the apparent ambiguities or contradictions intrinsic to faith. If faith or any of its aspects resists rational explanation, the only option, so they think, should be to explain it away. This is the direction taken by the likes of Hume,⁷⁵ Sartre⁷⁶ and Russell.⁷⁷ They assume there is no room for faith in human experience and they reckon human reason as the other of faith. They view reasonability as mere rationality, that is, mere compatibility of human thought and human affairs with the stipulations of language, philosophy, science or mathematics. The Gospels, the Fathers of the Church and the great Christian thinkers like St. Catherine of Alexandria, Boethius, St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas, however, teach us otherwise. What they offer us is a more nuanced and a more layered understanding of reasonability. At one level, faith is reasonable because our discernment of its content relies on our natural receptivity for such; but at another level, faith is reasonable because it can serve as a pathway to finding certain truths that lie beyond the traditional landscape of knowing. Most modern thinkers, particularly the champions of Enlightenment, try to convince us that knowing or knowledge can only be gained via epistemic cognition.⁷⁸ But Christian religion, together with Eastern thought and other monotheistic traditions like Judaism and Islam, remind us that there is more to knowledge than knowing in the epistemic sense. In fact, faith too is a form of knowing.⁷⁹ There is knowing in the practice of faith that comes with the cultivation of love and moderation of one's desires as in St. Augustine⁸⁰ or the search for that which nothing greater can be thought as in St. Anselm⁸¹ or the invocation of truth in the eloquence of silence as in St. Thomas Aquinas⁸²

⁷⁵ See David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷⁶ See Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans by Sarah Richmond (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁷⁷ See Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not A Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Touchstone Book, 1967).

⁷⁸ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 3–36.

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae, q.4, art. 2.

⁸⁰ St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1982), Book X, 189–227.

⁸¹ Anselm, "Proslogion," Chapter 2 in Anselm, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), 81.

⁸² Joseph Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas Aquinas: Three Essays*, trans. by John Murray, S.J. and Daniel O'Connor (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1966), 38–41.

or abiding in the tranquility of one's spiritual forbearance as in St. Catherine of Alexandria.⁸³ For these spiritual masters, the ambiguities of faith are provocations not for scientific explanation but for God's revelation. God makes himself known too through the so-called "sign of contradiction" spoken of by Simeon in the Gospel of St. Luke⁸⁴ and amplified by Edith Stein⁸⁵ and the Popes John XXIII,⁸⁶ John Paul II⁸⁷ and Benedict XVI.⁸⁸ Revelation as a sign of contradiction evokes surprising ways by which God's self-communication disrupts human history: the king appearing as a helpless infant, the master in the guise of lowly servant, the savior crossing himself out literally in the humiliation of the crucifixion. Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* speaks of the cross as the most radical expression of divine wisdom dramatized by the original "death of God," that is, in Jesus' emptying of himself in the very act of self-giving.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, we often confuse revelation with explanation and by explanation we often mean quick fix and bite-size answers. We need to recover a sense of revelation similar to what was alluded to by T.S. Eliot in the poem, *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for

⁸³ Capgrave, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, 71–97.

⁸⁴ Luke 2:34.

⁸⁵ Edith Stein, *The Hidden Life: Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts (The Collected Works of Edith Stein IV)*, trans. by Walraut Stein, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1992), 101.

⁸⁶ Pope John XXIII, "Address on the occasion of the solemn opening of the Second Vatican Council" (11 October 1962), <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html>.

⁸⁷ This is a pre-papacy text. See Karol Wojtyła, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).

⁸⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *General Audience* (15 March 2006), <https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060315.html>.

⁸⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio, on the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.pdf>.

But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.⁹⁰

The description, therefore, of faith as an intellectual assent may seem deceptively harmless for it conceals more than it discloses faith's spiritual, moral and existential demands. More than mere voluntary concurrence, faith requires us to recognize the uncertainties and contradictions which mark the act of believing. The current market-driven and digital civilization, however, disposes us against this. What predominates today is the phenomenon of a brand of Christianity which induces believers to take faith as a prompt for wish-fulfillment and to reckon God as a guarantor of certainty. For example, it has become a common practice among believers to "claim" something they are praying for (often, with the caveat, "in Jesus' name") or seal their optimism via what they call "manifesting" in the hope of convincing God to grant their prayers favorably. What they call prayer is actually spiritual blackmail and faith in this context is no more than a *quid pro quo* with God taken as hostage by the supposed worshippers. This practice of belief has reconfigured atheism from being the opposite of religious faith into an awkward, subterranean dimension of the very act of believing. This is a unique kind of atheism for it is found specifically among those who profess belief in God whom they have reduced, consciously or not, into an instrument of their cherished wishes. They need God and faith in God in order to eliminate any trace of uncertainty or doubt. But the way I see it, doubt or uncertainty, is not inimical but actually is conducive to faith. It can only be antithetical to faith if we allow doubt or uncertainty to get the better of us and get ourselves confined to the illusions either of despair or intellectual pride. The other name of faith, then, is courage and Jesus' invitation to believe is reiterated more clearly in his words, "Do not be afraid."⁹¹ Courage, truly, is the alter-ego of faith and in our postmodern world that daily is becoming more and more dangerously unmoored and uncertain, cultivating it is something anyone who claims to believe in God must take to heart. The call to believe, then, is a call for us to find the courage to cast our nets against the bleak promise of a good catch⁹² or leave our boat and brave the raging waters⁹³ or feed the multitude with only five loaves and a pair of fish.⁹⁴ It is the kind of faith that should allow us to pray with the Psalmist: *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*⁹⁵

⁹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 43–44.

⁹¹ Matthew 28:10; John 14:1.

⁹² John 21:1–10.

⁹³ Matthew 14:22–34.

⁹⁴ Matthew 14:13–18.

⁹⁵ Psalm 23:4.

Conclusion

In the preceding discussion, I offered some thoughts on courage within the limited context of the “courage to think.” I did not actually dwell on the virtue of courage directly but mainly on what I referred to as domains that warrant courage. I identified these domains as the life of the mind, truth-telling and the act of believing. It was difficult to talk of courage as “courage to think” given that neither Aristotle nor St. Thomas Aquinas considered courage as an intellectual virtue. Both Aristotle and St. Thomas counted courage (*andreia* for Aristotle; *fortitudo* for St. Thomas) as member of the so-called cardinal virtues but neither of them ever thought of it as something related to intellectual life. Courage, then, as presented in this paper, was conceived in a broader sense via its iteration in the three domains mentioned above. The three domains were chosen to showcase as well the possible loci where the unity between faith and reason could be demonstrated and the legacy of St. Catherine of Alexandria, appropriated. The word *courage* is intimately related with the Latin term for heart which is *cor*. With this in mind, one may look at courage as a virtue expressive of the integrity of who we are as human persons. It reminds us of the need to think with our hearts and to feel with our minds and not allow ourselves to be swayed by various forms of false dichotomies that are quite rampant today, particularly in the social media. The domains I mentioned also remind us of our spiritual and moral rootedness as Christian believers. Precisely because courage is part of the so-called cardinal virtues, courage may not be taken as a stand-alone virtue. As such, it can greatly complement and supplement the practices of thinking, truth-telling and believing, all of which are necessary for the attainment of our individual and collective human flourishing.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Theology, Religious Studies, and Ethics
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Abanto, Rowegie, “Duterte sits beside De Lima at House quad comm inquiry,” <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/11/13/duterte-sits-beside-de-lima-at-house-quad-comm-inquiry-1102>.
- Abarca, Charie, “Hontiveros wants Senate probe into Duterte-led DepEd’s secret fund,” <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1979620/hontiveros-wants-senate-probe-into-depeds-2023-confidential-fund>.

- Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso Books, 2005).
- Anselm, "Proslogion," Chapter 2 in Anselm, *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007).
- Aquinas, Thomas, *De Regno*,
<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/DeRegno.htm>.
- _____, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*,
<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeAnima.htm>.
- _____, *Summa Contra Gentiles*,
<https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/ContraGentiles1.htm>.
- _____, *Summa Theologiae*, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.
- Arendt, Hannah, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (London: Penguin Books, 2006).
- _____, *Responsibility and Judgment*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).
- Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2016).
- _____, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- _____, *Politics*, trans. by CDC Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998).
- Baudrillard, Jean, *The Vital Illusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections," (12 September 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.pdf.
- _____, "General Audience," (15 March 2006), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20060315.html.
- Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. by David R. Slavitt (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Harvard University Press, 2008).
- Bonoan, Raul J. (Ed.), *The Rizal-Pastells Correspondence: The Hitherto Unpublished Letters of Jose Rizal and Portions of Fr. Pablo Pastell's Fourth Letter and Translation of the Correspondence Together with a Historical Background and Theological Critique* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994).
- Capgrave, John, *The Life of Saint Katherine of Alexandria*, trans. by Karen A. Winstead (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).
- Cassirer, Ernst, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953).

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (Second Edition)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997).
- Cayabyab, Marc Jason, "Senate to hold last POGO hearing next week," in *The Philippine Star* (22 November 2024), <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/11/22/2402091/senate-hold-last-pogo-hearing-next-week>.
- Chalmers, David J., *Reality+: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023). (epub).
- Chi, Cristina, "House hearing surfaces conflicting claims on DepEd's confidential funds for 'leadership summits,'" in *The Philippine Star* (17 October 2024), <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/10/17/2393266/house-hearing-surfaces-conflicting-claims-depeds-confidential-funds-leadership-summits>.
- Cruz, RG, "Duterte statements at Senate probe can be used to file cases: Escudero, Diokno," in *ABS-CBN News* (29 October 2024), <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/10/29/duterte-statements-at-senate-probe-can-be-used-to-file-cases-escudero-diokno-1442>.
- de Guzman, Karen, "Quiboloy faces Senate probe on alleged trafficking, sexual abuses," in *ABS-CBN News*, (23 October 2024), <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/2024/10/23/quiboloy-faces-senate-probe-on-alleged-trafficking-sexual-abuses-917>.
- de Lima, Leila, "How I Survived 2,454 Days in Arbitrary Detention," in *Amnesty International* (20 March 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2024/03/leila-de-lima-philippines/>.
- David, Randy, "A truth commission on Duterte's war on drugs," in *randydavid.com* (22 September 2024), <https://www.randydavid.com/2024/09/a-truth-commission-on-dutertes-war-on-drugs/>.
- Descartes, Rene, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Michael Moriarty, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Eliot, T.S., *Four Quartets* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995).
- Flores, Dominique Nicole, "Rundown: What was revealed in House quadcom hearing on POGOs," in *The Philippine Star* (6 September 2024), <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/06/2383319/rundown-what-was-revealed-house-quadcom-hearing-pogos>.
- Furedi, Frank, *Wasted: Why Education is not Educating* (London: Continuum, 2009).
- Gale, Alexander, "Narrative Warfare: Competitive Victimhood in the Israel-Gaza Conflict," in *Modern Diplomacy* (19 November 2023),

- <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2023/11/19/narrative-warfare-competitive-victimhood-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/>>.
- Gellner, Ernest, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- Greenfield, Adam, *Radical Technologies: The Design of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 2018).
- Guillermo, Bomen, "Ang ISI at ang Alamat ng Internasyonal na Komunidad ng mga Syentista," in *Asian Studies*, 36:2 (January 2020), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306111992_Ang_ISI_at_ang_Alamat_ng_Internasyonal_na_Komunidad_ng_mga_Syentista>.
- Hacker, Andrew, *The Math Myth and Other STEM Delusions* (New York: The New Press, 2016).
- Hadas, Moses (Ed.) *Greek Drama: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
- Han, Byung-Chul, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017).
- _____, *Vita Contemplativa: In Prase of Inactivity*, trans. by Daniel Steuer, (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2024).
- Harari, Yuval, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. (New York: Random House, 2024).
- Hume, David, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. by Dorothy Coleman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- Jesmin, Raisha, "The Age of Disinformation: How Online Media Propelled the Son of A Former Dictator to Power in the Philippines and what It Means for Democracy," in *Human Rights Pulse* (27 May 2022), <<https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-age-of-disinformation-how-online-media-propelled-the-son-of-a-former-dictator-to-power-in-the-philippines-and-what-it-means-for-democracy>>
- Lee, Brie, "Are Influencers The New Public Intellectuals?" (14 March 2024)., <<https://www.elle.com.au/culture/are-influencers-the-new-public-intellectuals/>>;
- Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- Mabini, Apolinario, *La Revolucion Filipina: The Political Writings of Apolinario Mabini, Vol. 1 (1898–1899)* (Manila: The National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2022).
- Majul, Cesar Adib, *Mabini and the Philippine Revolution* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996).

- Maqbool, Aleem, "‘Anointed by God’: The Christians who see Trump as their saviour," in *BBC News* (17 November 2024), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20g1zvvgj4do>>.
- Marshall, Hannah and Alena Drieschova, "Post-Truth Politics in the UK’s Brexit Referendum," in *New Perspectives*, 26:3, (2018), 89–105.
- McCorquodale, Sara, *Influence: How Social Media Influencers are Shaping Our Digital Future* (New York: Bloomsbury Business, 2020).
- Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. by Maurice O’C. Walshe (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009).
- Midgley, Mary, *What is Philosophy For?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
- Mintz, Steven, "More Than Sound Bites: Reclaiming the role of public intellectuals in the age of social media," (20 February 2025), <<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/2025/02/20/reclaiming-role-public-intellectuals-social-media-age>>.
- Muller, Helgard, *President Donald Trump: The Son of Man–The Christ*, (Colorado: Outskirts Press, 2022).
- Muller, Jerry Z., *The Tyranny of Metrics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Natali, Carlo, *Aristotle: His Life and School* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).
- Nery, John, "Rizal as Catholic," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (20 December 2014), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/81338/rizal-as-catholic>>.
- Newman, John Henry Cardinal, *The Idea of A University* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1992).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- _____, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by Adrian del Caro (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- Ong, Jonathan Corpus and Cabañes, John Vincent A., "Architects of Networked Disinformation: Behind the Scenes of Troll Accounts and Fake News Production in the Philippines," (February 2018), <<https://newtontechfordev.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ARCHITECTS-OF-NETWORKED-DISINFORMATION-FULL-REPORT.pdf>>.
- Orwell, George, *1984* (New York: Signet Classics, 2023).
- Panti, Llanesca T., "4 subpoenaed OVP employees finally attend House hearing," in *GMA News Online* (25 November 2024), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/928062/ovp-employees-house-budget-use-probe/story/>>.

- Pieper, Joseph, *The Silence of St. Thomas Aquinas: Three Essays*, trans. by John Murray, S.J. & Daniel O'Connor, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1966).
- Pinugu, Eleanor, "The costs of a grade-obsessed mindset," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (27 May 2024), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/173989/the-costs-of-a-grade-obsessed-mindset>>.
- Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, trans. by Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).
- _____, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- John XXIII, "Address on the occasion of the solemn opening of the Second Vatican Council," (11 October 1962), <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html>.
- John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio, on the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), <https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.pdf>.
- Ressa, Maria, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future*, (New York: Harpercollins Publishers, 2022).
- Retona, Merinette, "Marcos benefited most from election-related disinfo in 2021," *Vera Files* (28 December 2021), <<https://verafiles.org/articles/vera-files-fact-check-yearender-marcos-jr-benefited-most-ele>>.
- Rizal, Jose, *Noli Me Tangere*, trans. by Harold Augenbraum (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).
- _____, *Political and Historical Writings (Volume VII)*, (Manila: National Historical Institute, 1996).
- Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- _____, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, Volume 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- _____, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Volume 3 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Russell, Bertrand, *Why I Am Not A Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, (New York: Touchstone Book, 1967).
- Sadler, Gregory, "Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Patroness of Christian Philosophers, Inspiration for Contemporary Christian Philosophy?" *The Alexandrian*, 1:1, (2007), 1–13.

- San Juan, David Michael M., "A Critique of Scopus-Centrism in Philippine Universities and Educational and/or Research Agencies: Why Filipinos Should Write Research in Filipino," in *Humanities Diliman*, (July–December 2024) 21:2, 133–171.
- Sartre, Jean Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Sarah Richmond (New York: Routledge, 2018).
- Smith, Justin E.H., "It's All Over," in *The Web* (3 January 2019), <<https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/its-all-over/>>.
- Sophocles, "Oedipus The King" in Hadas, Moses (ed.) *Greek Drama. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).
- St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1982).
- St. John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. by E. Allison Peers (New York: Image Books, 2005).
- Stack, Michelle, *Global University Rankings and the Mediatization of Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
- Stein, Edith, *The Hidden Life: Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts (The Collected Works of Edith Stein IV)*, trans. by Waltraut Stein (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1992).
- Stone, I.F., *The Trial of Socrates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).
- Taylor, Matthew D., "The second coming of Donald J. Trump," in *New Humanist* (13 February 2025), <<https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/6380/the-second-coming-of-donald-j-trump>>.
- Weisheipl, James, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Works*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983).
- Wojtyla, Karol, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).
- Zizek, Slavoj, "Israel-Palestine conflict: Who is to blame?," in *The New Statesman* (19 October 2023), <<https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/10/israel-palestine-blame>>.

Why Radical Change is Elusive: Rethinking Social Transformation

Ian Raymond B. Pacquing

Abstract: Widespread poverty, government incompetence, environmental degradation, and other social problems lead to persistent socio-political discontent. While we actively express our despair through critiques and protests, our society remains fixated on a routine cycle of unproductive and ineffectual social relations and institutional frameworks. It seems that we are trapped in a perpetual loop, leaving us questioning what prevents meaningful social transformation. This paper contends that our passive engagement in our socio-political affairs and our seemingly inhibited ability for radical change is fundamentally influenced by forces and patterns entrenched in our current socio-structural arrangements, which rechannels “social libidinal impulses.” I argue that deeply embedded patterns not only mitigate our critiques and grievances but also suppress our capacity for critical awareness, thereby hindering a thoughtful social transformation. To explore these issues, I first revisit Fromm’s concept of social character, showing how socioeconomic patterns condition collective behaviors and desires. Second, I present how emotional and psychological attachments are formed within the existing socio-economic framework that sustains social conformity and limits transformative changes in our society. Finally, I propose that our aspirations for meaningful social change are anchored not only in our capacities for rational discourses but basically in our emotional and libidinal attachments.

Keywords: economy, public discontent, social impulses social transformation

The disheartening conditions we face in our society today pose a formidable challenge. Certainly, some sectors are aggressive and critical towards structural inequities yet, despite the judicious attitude, the same socio-structural patterns and modes of social behaviors inhabit us.

We remain trapped in systemic cycles of inequality, facing daunting obstacles and adversarial power dynamics. The presence of these problems in our lives is even more compounded by multiple tasks to fulfill our overwhelming workloads in our relentless pursuit of financial stability and fulfilling personal and communal obligations. This observation also aligns with what Pacquing commented: convoluting our social relations is our passive reception of our government leaders' ineptitude and myopic capacities, whose elitist and oligarchic interests permeate the political spectrum.¹ These distressing daily affairs leave us helpless and indifferent to initiate fundamental reforms. The current situation we experience everyday compels us to be pawns amidst the inequities of power relations. It seems that to remain apathetic is the only alternative. No matter how some of us voice our criticisms for the betterment of the majority, it still remains unheard. Our resentments, protests, public discussions, and critical engagements in different social media sites seem to be trivial, if not totally irrelevant, to the very logic of our socio-structural arrangements. We remain to be of no importance to many, and the same systemic cycle continues to weave the very fiber of our daily lives. We are trapped and fixed in deep-seated successions of social and political impotence, and the only hope out of this social quagmire is to just surrender and accept these social perversions as the natural course of things. Be that as it may, we are then pushed to embrace an individually strategic means of finding the niche best suited for us. We cannot entrust our hopes and expectations to a decadent system bereft of any values for growth and development. We cannot rely on our political leaders either, nor lean ourselves into the wisdom and righteousness of some of our religious superiors, whose daily affairs are kept on emphasizing the state of heavenly bliss, seemingly insensitive to the concrete and mundane lives of so many. Moreover, Contreras laments how academia has shifted its focus from addressing human suffering and social injustices towards prioritizing metrics and rankings.² How about the civil society movement? One becomes skeptical about what motivates groups or civil societies regarding their claims on social justice and rights.³ More often than not, these people, as claimed by Freire, are driven by their unconscious desires, not toward *real* and *radical* change in society, but by their need to be the successor in the political

¹ See Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, "A Psycho-Social Reflection on the Patrimonial Culture in the Philippines" in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 23:2 (June 2022), 281–299.

² See Antonio Contreras, "The English professor is just one price we have to pay for turning higher education into a commodity" in *The Manila Times* (18 May 2024), <<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/18/opinion/columns/the-english-professor-is-just-one-price-we-have-to-pay-for-turning-higher-education-into-a-commodity/1947222>>.

³ Cf. Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 9–31.

landscape, the next boss in the bureaucratic hierarchy.⁴ The struggles that we need to overcome such as never-ending poverty, widespread inequality, corruption in the government, and the enduring political dynasties in our country often leave us helpless and lost in a repetitive cycle of despair. Take for example the rampant dissatisfaction in our society where we constantly protest government corruption and the domination of our political spectrum by elite oligarchic families, yet the same political power brokers rule the system thereby perpetuating cycles of nepotism and systemic injustice.⁵ Even our currency which is symbolized by democratic icons like Ninoy Aquino on the 500-peso bill, paradoxically represents a political elite lineage. Yet, it serves as a reminder of our unresolved historical struggles and the challenges we face for genuine social transformation. Nonetheless, despite these systemic issues that we have, we collectively yearn for a society guided by true democratic ideals—where aspirations and dignity can flourish. Though these could be our goals, I maintain, however, that they are just as elusive as they are. I argue that we could remain in a systemic loop because of the crucial role of the social character i.e., our emotional attachments and behaviors remain deeply intertwined with the socio-economic and political structures that sustain the status quo.

Relying on the Frommian notion of social character, I believe that as long as the dynamics of our socio-structural arrangements produce patterns or forces, i.e. social determinants that shape our desires or impulses to follow the same, we remain trapped in the systemic loop of social impotence. With the underlying power dynamics embedded within these institutional frameworks, the resultant social character readily captures, stabilizes, aligns, compensates, and conditions individual libidinal drives. Thus, despite the wanton problems we face, and the will to surmount them, we only repeat the same old systemic problem we wish to address. It is the social character that provides a sense of amelioration or pacification that maintains social equilibrium. Despite our critiques and protests, the very logic emanating from the institutional arrangements caters to a particular characterology that coheres to the underlying status quo. To elaborate further on this essay, let me start with how Fromm details the notion of the social character.

⁴ See Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), 45.

⁵ See Pacquing, "A Psycho-Social Reflection on the Patrimonial Culture in the Philippines", 281–284.

The Social Character⁶

In *The Sane Society*, Fromm mentions that each society, to achieve its goals, must be structuralized to operate well. It must function following how social members organize and plan every requirement for the fulfillment of its goals and objectives. Certain conditions should be socially mandated and must be considered fundamental for the smooth operation and survival of its members. They need to act and behave following the precepts of their group, community, or society. Fromm then elaborately expounds,

Each society is structuralized and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions. These conditions include methods of production and distribution which in turn depend on raw materials, industrial techniques, climate, size of the population, political and geographical factors, cultural traditions, and influences to which society is exposed...society can exist only by operating within the framework of its particular structure. The members of the society and/or the various classes or status groups within it have *to behave in such a way as to be able to function in the sense required by the social system.* (italics mine)⁷

To accomplish social ends, we passively and actively adapt and assimilate for ourselves certain demands, tasks, or obligations mandated for social cooperation and survival.⁸ Similar to Durkheim's division of labor, we need

⁶ In my earlier work, "Neoliberalism and Our Precarious Culture," in *Kritike*, 11:1 (June 2017), I used Erich Fromm's concept of social character to argue that economic systems (Neoliberalism) redirect individual desires and impulses. In this current paper, I expand on this theoretical perspective by demonstrating that social character not only redirects individual drives but also fosters profound emotional and psychological attachments. These attachments transform our participation in established socio-economic structures into a moral imperative—without which survival and social recognition become unattainable.

⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955), 77ff.

⁸ Solidarity is essential within the members of a particular tribe, group, or community. Durkheim expresses this union as "mechanical solidarity," where each social member must engage in *shared similarities* within a specific tribe or group, sacrificing some freedom to generate a collective good. Cf. Peter Zima, *Subjectivity and Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 2–5. The same is said in the philosophy of Rousseau when he explains that for us to survive, we need to shed parts of our freedom and "create, by combination, a totality of forces sufficient to overcome the obstacles resisting them, to direct their operation by a single impulse, and make them act in unison." See Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*, trans. by Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54. As social members, our identities as individuals are shaped by these social-structural arrangements.

to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that integrates social, political, economic, cultural, and religious aspects to create a social framework that ensures the survival of society.⁹ Fromm then asserts that as members of a particular group or community, a distinct product of the socialization process emerges. We internalize and reflect the values, beliefs, and behaviors of our group, community, or society where we belong. After all, we are “socialized a priori” i.e., we are socialized beings in the grip of dynamic forces within society. Fromm then says “Society and the individual are not “opposite” to each other. Society is nothing but living, concrete individuals, and the individual can live only as a social human being.”¹⁰ As we integrate and align with our environment, we are also molded and shaped ensuring that our drives and desires are regulated with what the system demands for its stability and reproduction. As such, in a highly technologically advanced modern setup, we are predominantly contoured by the necessity to produce and, in highly specific ways, fit into a specific historical situation of society.¹¹ Our libidinal impulses—rooted in the need for survival, recognition, and belonging—are rechanneled and shaped in ways that correspond with the system’s logic. In other words, as we are incorporated into a larger schema of how life works, the social characterology sways and conditions us that to produce and consume is a way to cope with the demands of the modern world. It becomes a moral imperative for us to fit in and survive.¹²

Today, our work demands much of our time and energy and as our duties and obligations become complex, we feel that our daily routine turns to be exasperating. Balancing life like engaging ourselves with multiple projects, while simultaneously, meeting tight deadlines, and adjusting our time for our private and familial affairs can be overwhelming. As we expend more energy on fulfilling our daily routines, our libidinal impulses, says Mitchell, must express and maintain the socially mandated patterns through

As Dunn suggests, these arrangements are foundational for it is the bedrock for our legitimacy, moral, and even political claims. See Robert Dunn, *Identity Crisis: A Social Critique of Postmodernity*, (London: Minnesota Press, 1998), 24.

⁹ See Robert K. Merton, “Durkheim’s Division of Labor in Society” in *American Journal of Sociology*, 40: 3 (November, 1934), 319–323.

¹⁰ See Erich Fromm, “Man’s Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture” in Erich Fromm, *Beyond Freud* (New York: American Mental Health Association, 2010), 26ff.

¹¹ See Ranier Funk, “Erich Fromm’s Concept of Social Character and Its Relevance for Clinical Practice” in M. Cortina and M. Maccoby (Eds.), *A Prophetic Analyst. Erich Fromm’s Contribution to Psychoanalysis* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 7. See <<https://opus4.kobv.de/opus4-Fromm/frontdoor/index/index/start/34/rows/10/sortfield/score/sortorder/desc/searchtype/simple/query/Rainer+Funk/languagefq/eng/docId/9974>>.

¹² Cf. Hartmut Rosa and William Scheuermann, *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity* (US: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), *Introduction*, 12.

which we relate to life and society.¹³ Hence, our desires, drives, or natural impulses must be conditioned and rechanneled into socially accepted behaviors. The social character diverts our energies to the extent that what we do, and how we should do must be patterned after what is demanded of us by the system. For instance, being productive at work, participating in organizational or community activities, and maintaining social relationships are all conventional social practices that are formed out of the logic of these socio-structural frameworks. Physically and emotionally, we need to regulate all our impulses to cater to their demands. However, Fromm warns that the more compelling the exigencies of living, such as striving for career advancement or maintaining financial stability, the greater the risk of alienating our true selves.¹⁴ This can manifest as a sense of disconnection from our passions and interests in life. Our disengagement could compel us to question and restructure the existing social relations. But we seem to remain passive and “incapacitated” to act. Why is this so? What immanent role does the social character provide?

The “Libidinized” Jobs

Fromm admits that regardless of the suffocating and alienating demands of modern living, we can freely choose what strategies we ascribe to fulfill our dreams and aspirations.¹⁵ Rationally, we persuade ourselves that working overtime or sacrificing personal time can lead to career growth, financial rewards, or job security. Certainly, we give importance, value, or utility to what we truly aspire to. It is at this point that we assign different plans of action for achieving them.¹⁶ We rationalize over time that our calculated approaches and actions assure us success and development in life. Our justifications ought to be the bedrock of why we must fulfill certain social tasks that could benefit us within the system. The idea of career growth, building professional relationships, and ultimately, financial security, could lessen the fear of disconnection or estrangements in our group or community.¹⁷ So, whatever would be our justifications, it absolutely can

¹³ See Stephen A. Mitchell, *Influence and Autonomy in Psychoanalysis* (London, Routledge, 2013), 66.

¹⁴ See Erich Fromm, “Man’s Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture” in Erich Fromm, *Beyond Freud* (New York: American Mental Health Association, 2010), 13.

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶ See Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

¹⁷ Fromm insists that if the conditions enunciated by our socio-structural arrangements are not conducive to the spontaneous activity of the individual, and as long as the demands for innovations curtail the psychic capacity for growth and development, we cannot strike a balance between stability and material production or innovations. See Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom* (US:

ensure that our efforts contribute to our personal and professional growth. Thus, says Damasio “reasoning strategies revolve around goals, options for action, predictions of future outcome, and plans for implementation of goals at varied time scales.”¹⁸ Further, our rational strategies for survival within our immediate environment require a vast repertoire of knowledge that needs our attention and must be held active by us.¹⁹

However, Fromm warns that relying simply on the *rationale* or justifications of our actions would be insufficient. To remain steadfast in our jobs, for instance, does not only involve our rational justifications of *why we are doing this*. There must be something more that attracts us. For Fromm, the externally necessary must be absorbed and become internally satisfying.²⁰ Subjective satisfaction, i.e., emotional relief, is needed for us to perform our individually mandated tasks. Without the impetus of emotional relief, internal frictions arise. What we do then must have an alluring—affectual element, from which our subjective or emotional dimension is pacified, and thus, an internal gratification of our desires. The idea of career growth within the organization or the allurement of financial security that goes with it, gives us a sense of emotional stability. It is here that we need to consider how our emotions and desires play an active role in the justifications of our actions. As we approach the world, our expected roles in the network of social relations are not just matters of cognitive or rational mappings, but internal satisfaction as well.²¹ Take for instance job-related tasks. No matter how strenuous they are, we find relief in the financial security it entails, i.e., our jobs could provide modest means to survive. It appeases our desires by luxuriating ourselves with the comforts of the modern world. And, after expending all our energies for years, we probably anticipate and compose our fears through the economic benefits we receive upon retirement. Thus, through our actions and reactions to our immediate necessities, we anticipate outcomes with bodily

Farrar & Rhinehart, 1941), 221. Fromm also mentions that the development of the modern world which resulted in high-speed culture has demeaned humanity and forced the individual to transform his life into a collector and user and thus the lesser he thinks and feels himself as “I am.” See Erich Fromm, *On Being Human*, edited by Rainer Funk (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1999), 7ff.

¹⁸ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994), 84.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See Fromm, “Man’s Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture,” 27.

²¹ Cf. Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2018), 177; see also other works of Fromm – *The Art of Loving*, 1957.

feelings, and in this process, Kassab implies, we forecast affectual stances that serve as pivotal factors for our rational decisions.²²

Our appraisal of how things are, whether they may be political, religious, or economic, as argued by Kingston and Ferry, always involves our subjective-emotional stance, i.e. fascinating, alluring, captivating, or alienating, and thus disadvantageous for our well-being.²³ This is also intimated in Kassab's opinion when she explains that the affectual approaches toward the world determine our actions, responses, preferences, sets of reactions, and public opinions.²⁴ Hence, as mentioned by Fromm earlier, this internal (subjective) satisfaction is merged with our rational justifications so that our evaluations always integrate rational and emotional elements of how best we could resonate with our natural and social environment.²⁵ As Szanto and Landweer put it, "Our very *being-in-the-world* is always and already a way of being affectively attuned to oneself, others, and the world."²⁶ Indeed, what we value most in society involves the interplay between our cognitive and emotional capacities.²⁷ The subjective satisfaction of what we do determines our responses and consequent actions, thereby widening our preferences and opinions about the world. Fromm then asserts that our rational strategies for survival, work, and daily routines are intertwined with emotional elements; without this integration, we would fail to navigate life successfully. How we understand and interpret our spatiotemporal slots, act, and react to them are inseparably linked with affectual qualities.²⁸ As asserted by Fromm himself, we need then to emphasize that the dialectic between our justifications and internal satisfactions (reason and emotion) are concrete manifestations of approaching the world, encompassing not only physiological survival but also the emotional dimensions that drive our life processes.²⁹ Thus our engagements and actions with the world contain a modicum of "libidinality", i.e. emotional resonance - an inherently satisfying value, without which, we relegate or neglect our actions as something alienating. Thus, for Fromm, the satisfaction that we get through our actions and reactions points to our

²² Cf. Hanna Amir Kassab, *The Power of Emotion in Politics, Philosophy, and Ideology* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), *Introduction*, 2

²³ Cf. Rebecca Kingston and Leonard Ferry (eds.), *Bringing the Passion Back In* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 5.

²⁴ See Kassab, *The Power of Emotion in Politics, Philosophy, and Ideology*, 5.

²⁵ See Fromm, "Man's Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture," 27.

²⁶ Thomas Szanto and Hilge Landweer (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the Phenomenology of Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2020), 9.

²⁷ Cf. Kassab, *The Power of Emotion in Politics, Philosophy, and Ideology*, 3.

²⁸ See Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom* (US: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1941), 211.

²⁹ See Fromm, "Man's Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture," 19.

psychic qualities from which our emotional libidinal capacities lie.³⁰ Without these internal fulfillments, our experiences and accommodations in the world become naught.

However, the more pressing question I think that we need to address is despite these thrilling and spilling of modern living as argued by Frosh,³¹ and the helplessness and powerlessness they entail, why does modern society seem still to be intact and keep on replicating itself? What happens to our critical capacity as self-determining agents to change our society for the better? Fromm in his 1937 lecture clarifies these when he says

But if the exacted occupation or manner of conduct is alien to him, externally imposed, then this satisfaction must come by way of developing a character structure on the basis of which *the socially necessary becomes something satisfying to the individual, something he strives for and accomplishes.*³²

The Role of the Social Character

As the foundation of his psychosocial philosophy, Fromm asserts the social character as the unconscious forces and patterns within society that redirect individual desires and energies towards specific objectives to achieve societal goals. How socio-political and economic structures are designed and consequently coordinated and implemented, generates specific patterns or power dynamics. Accordingly, certain values and beliefs are developed as a matter of survival and recognition.³³ And vital in the constitution of social character is the role of the socioeconomic paradigm. Once the need for survival is ascertained, all other values and needs imperative for the sustenance of society follow. He expresses this thought in *The Sane Society*, from which he points out the importance of the socioeconomic paradigm.

The task of survival implies that man has to produce, that is, he has to secure the minimum of food and shelter necessary for survival, and the tools needed for even the most rudimentary processes of production. The method of production in turn determines the social relations

³⁰ See Fromm, "Man's Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture" 27. (Italics mine)

³¹ Cf. Stephen Frosh, *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and the Self*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991), 6–7. See also Erich Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1963), 12.

³² Fromm, "Man's Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture," 27–28. (Italics mine)

³³ See Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 78. (Italics mine)

existing in a given society. *It determines the mode and practice of life.*³⁴

Accordingly, the economic structure, as the foundation of our daily subsistence, creates or regulates other ways that define how we must live. For instance, our choices, no matter how liberal and rational they may be, are prompted by the very characterology of the existing status quo. Our decisions on our needs and activities such as schools, housing, transportation services, health insurance, employment arrangements, or family dynamics are all shaped by the existing economic structural status quo. However, beyond material survival, the social character also deals with our attachment to the system, which is also deeply emotional. Social character does not merely dictate economic behavior, it also arranges and shapes how we feel about our place in society, creating a powerful affective bond to the status quo. Once the socioeconomic patterns satisfy the modes of survival, our emotional and instinctual drives naturally align with them. The sense of characterology that arises from our choices contributes to the formation of shared psychological attributes, values, and beliefs. Shaped by socioeconomic conditions and cultural norms, the social character leads to distinct modes of social interactions, i.e., how we approach others and the world in the pursuit of survival, recognition, and belongingness.³⁵ As stressed by Abromeit, the social character then of a particular group, community, or society is considered an emotionally charged phenomenon redirecting our impulses and desires to align with the existing status quo.³⁶ Take for example the market industry. The social character that emanates from it does not only cater to the survival of its members. More than this, the immanent character sways us to form values and beliefs, that align with the system. It leads to the development of behavior and attitudes that sustain the structural alignments. As initially expressed by Fromm the economic dimension which has something to do with one's survival,³⁷ the social character does not mean meeting the basic necessities in life only, but more than that, it conditions us unconsciously to participate in the economic system—being productive, consuming, and achieving success as demanded by the market. Our mental as well as emotional capacities are swayed and redirected so that productivity, consumption, and economic progress are now considered principles and ideals that stem from the characterology of the market industry. It is in this sense that our engagements and actions within the ambit

³⁴ See *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 110.

³⁶ Cf. John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 206–207.

³⁷ See Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 76.

of the market characterology form emotional attachments. As Funk commented how we adapt and assimilate things for survival immensely modifies individual libidinal drives.³⁸ Abromeit also discloses this observation of Funk by narrating that the social character speaks primarily of those libidinal impulses that bind social members unconsciously to existing social relations.³⁹ Thus, the social character becomes a powerful force that allows our society to cohere, thrive, and bolster its structural edifices. As noted by Wilde, it “cements” society together for it involves an “emotional matrix” embedded in particular social relations.⁴⁰ Hence, Fromm describes this when he says.

Human energies appear in social life not in some general form, but are, so to speak, guided into those channels that make them useful to the functioning of a certain society. Character seen from this point of view is the definite form in which psychic energy appears as a productive force in the social process. Or, expressed differently, the socially typical character is a part of the whole social machinery without which it would not function, or not sufficiently.⁴¹

Thus, how we think, act, and feel, within a given social system,⁴² and, how we derive meaning and purpose from things we acquire for our growth and development are certainly interjected with attachments and, thus, with emotional significance. In other words, the social character introjects tranquilizing capacities to overshadow any form of resistance to the prevailing dominant social paradigm.

As an emotional matrix that binds individual libidinal drive and the present social relations, the social character manifests itself in our yearnings, fears, expectations, and strivings.⁴³ As we navigate economically for our subsistence, the determination of what to *produce* and *how to produce* must be sufficiently and emotionally satisfying, ensuring the maintenance of psychic equilibrium within, i.e. without friction. Similarly, the socio-structural

³⁸ See Ranier Funk, “Erich Fromm’s Concept of Social Character” in *Social Thought & Research*, 21: 1–2 (1998): 215–228. www.jstor.org/ustlib.ust.edu.ph/action/doBasicSearch?Query=Rainer+Funk.

³⁹ See Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, 209.

⁴⁰ See Lawrence Wilde, *Erich Fromm and the Quest for Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 20; See also Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, 209.

⁴¹ Fromm “Man’s Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture,” 30.

⁴² Cf. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*, 239–240.

⁴³ See Funk, “Erich Fromm’s Concept of Social Character,” 222–223.

arrangements (social, political, cultural, economic, and even religious) must provide and sustain the requisite psychological energy necessary for the fulfillment of our responsibilities and obligations as social agents. In other words, Fromm explains that the socio-structural arrangements need to generate forces and patterns that hold society together and this comes in the form of a characterology arising from the dominant economic and social conditions.⁴⁴ Take for instance the fashions and trends rooted in the market industry, coupled with its power dynamics. All of these push us to develop particular psychological characteristics and social values that mitigate and regulate how we think, act, and feel within the system. Hence, it affects individual emotional drives. The characterology of the market interweaves our deeper emotional and psychological needs assuring us that our fears, desires, or expectations are all aligned with the established rules and regulations provided for. In this sense, survival is not only meeting the essential commodities in life. More so, our participation in the logic of the industry also leads to recognition and respect. Our aspirations for acknowledgment and recognition within our group or community are tied to success, status, or material wealth, which are in themselves products of the prevailing characterology.⁴⁵ In other words, the social character of a particular group, community, or society does not deal only with values or norms that we need to adopt for our survival. More than this, the characterology speaks of the alleviation and consolation of our psychic drives and emotional needs as we assimilate and adapt to our environment. As such, Heine implies the fact that our psychic drives for approval, for instance, or the fear of exclusions are emotionally charged social relations that fuel our need to conform to the existing social character.⁴⁶ As an emotional bedrock, social character permeates *how we think and act* just to preserve, sustain, and maintain our slot in social relations.⁴⁷ For Fromm, however, the social character as an architectural design of our psychic drives, is, nonetheless, culturally, and socially processed.⁴⁸ Although culturally constructed, the power of the social character cannot be overlooked in social analysis for it shapes our emotional attachments and connections as a matter of social recognition and survival. It sways our impulses to the extent that each of us must act, produce, and behave accordingly. Hence, *what to produce, where to produce, and how to produce* are linked with those forces and patterns instituted

⁴⁴ Cf. Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ*, 18–30.

⁴⁵ See Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 107.

⁴⁶ See Steven J. Heine, *Cultural Psychology*, 3rd Edition (London: W.W. Norton, 2016), 29.

⁴⁷ Cf. Teresa Brennan, *Transmission of Affects* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 51.

⁴⁸ Fromm explains how a patricentric mentality has produced behaviors that are economically and culturally viable within the capitalist system. See Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970), 108.

by the existing social system. What kind of work is valued, how tasks are performed, and the expected professional behavior within the social system? In this sense, we need to function following the expectations of the socio-political and economic parity. This is the reason why we highly rate values such as individualism, competition, consumerism, and productivity for they resonate with our psychic-emotional drives for survival, recognition, and belongingness, which in turn, are existential human needs. Hence, through the ubiquitous nature of the social character, we develop symmetrical relations between our physical, emotional, as well as psychical relations. Fromm describes this when he says,

As long as the circumstance of this labile equilibrium exists, the character tends to strengthen inwardly the existing social relations, especially the class relations. It is, so to speak, the cement that holds the given social structure together. It supplies the impulses that drive the people to do what is bidden, to avoid what is forbidden, and to find a certain degree of satisfaction in conforming to existing relations.⁴⁹

This symmetrical relation provides a certain “degree of comfort, enabling us as individuals to function on a day-to-day basis.”⁵⁰ Indeed, ours is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, but *one of wanting to act as we have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting...*⁵¹ Nevertheless, if social conditions could no longer provide sustenance for the pacification of our libidinal drives, a lag in our social relations arise. Once the socioeconomic and political platforms are unable to sustain basic requirements for survival and recognition, emotional friction emerges. Thus, Fromm warns

as long as the objective conditions of the society and the culture remain stable, the social character has a predominantly stabilizing function. If the external conditions change in such a way that they do not fit anymore with the traditional social character, a lag arises which often changes the function of character into an

⁴⁹ Fromm, “Man’s Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture,” 29.

⁵⁰ Cf. Lauren Langman and George Lundskow, *God, Guns, Gold, and Glory: American Character and Its Discontents* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 5.

⁵¹ See Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 77. (Italics mine)

element of disintegration instead of stabilization, into dynamite instead of a social mortar, as it were.⁵²

Thus, as a psychic intermediary between the existing social relations, the social character serves as the equilibrium where we fulfill socially mandated tasks and find internal satisfaction from them. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that, despite our protests and expressions of dissatisfaction with the current socio-political order, we are unable to break free from the same systemic cycle, regardless of how problematic it may be, as long as the dominant characterology offers psychological and emotional stability. What real impact can our protests and criticisms have if we remain neutralized, balanced, and in equilibrium within the existing power dynamics of society? Therefore, as previously stated, the power of social character cannot be understated, as it helps us understand why passivity persists despite the social chaos we have.

Conclusion

As mentioned, social character is the social libidinal impulses that sustain a group, or society to perform its task in line with its objectives. Fundamental to this is the role of the socio-economic arrangement where society needs to realign individual energies as a matter of survival. As such, we need to pattern our daily affairs towards the attainment of those social objectives.

However, unknown to many is how the socio-structural arrangements, together with the implementation of economic policies, create forces and patterns that evolve into social conditions. The logic that emanates from these confluences is what we call the social character. It manifests itself through the psychological traits, values, and behavior that arise from the interconnections of the socio-structural order. These traits, shaped predominantly by how socio-structural patterns are implemented, guarantee that our desires, fantasies, dreams, and ambitions are all aligned with what the social status quo demands for its stability and reproduction. In other words, the social character soothes and pacifies individual emotions and impulses to the extent that our psychic drives, rooted in our need for recognition and survival are channeled and shaped in ways that need to align with the system. As I argued, under the logic of capitalism, survival is not only meeting the basic commodities in life. Survival is attached to how we are recognized under the system. It is not only procuring food, but we might as well produce, consume, and compete, which are principles and beliefs

⁵² *Ibid.*

programmed by the inner logic of the system itself. Thus, our behavior that follows deals with deeper emotional and psychological needs that are manipulated and exploited by the system.

For Fromm, aside from the material survival that we need to fulfill, other existential human needs, such as relatedness, belongingness, and rootedness, need to be satisfied. However, I believe that such requisitions are also tied to the social character of the current social order. Social relations and recognition, for example, are tied to success, and material wealth, which are valuable traits along with the logic of the capital. Conforming to what is demanded by the capital like consumer trends, achieving professional success, or gaining social status, is a must, and we need to abide by it if we want to be recognized, related, and belong in the modern world. Through the advertising media, the networking of our socio-structural patterns stokes the drive for recognition by associating it with status symbols, consumption, and competition. Hence, the inner satisfaction that we get because of the professional success we achieve, points to those psychic qualities from which our emotional and libidinal impulses depend. The more we align with this pattern, the more we internalize it as part of our social character.

Since the social character deals with deeply seated emotionally charged ways of our daily affairs, how we are related to the world is a matter of existential concern.⁵³ Our encounters, no matter how trivial and minute they may be, speak of our joys, desires, or the struggles and fears from which we progressively respond or inactively recede.⁵⁴ As Tenhouten observes, human beings are not motivated entirely by rational calculations of their environment. More importantly, they are inspired by their emotional commitments to norms, values, and beliefs.⁵⁵ Thus, recognition and survival “is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, *but one of wanting to act as we have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting*”⁵⁶ Conforming and submitting to the social status quo provides that labile equilibrium, where inner satisfaction, i.e., subjective satisfaction provides a degree of comfort, and thus allows us to exist despite our daily struggles in life.

Why do we keep on repeating the same systemic loop? Why is there so much passivity and despite our radical critiques of the system, we find ourselves in the same pattern time and again? It is because, I believe, the role

⁵³ See Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship with the World*, trans. by James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 23.

⁵⁴ See Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, “Reclaiming the World: Hartmut Rosa’s Theory of Resonance” in *Philosophia: An International Journal of Philosophy*, 24: 2 (June 2023), 275.

⁵⁵ Warren D. Tenhouten, *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life* (New York: Routledge, 2007), xi.

⁵⁶ Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 77. (Italics mine)

of the social character where our ways of survival and recognition are unconsciously rechanneled, and manipulated by how the socio-structural arrangements are designed and enacted. The degree of satisfaction felt by the poor once they align and adhere themselves with the elite as a matter of survival and recognition does not only concern their rational capacities, but more than that, it is their psychic qualities that are consoled. Voting for undesirable candidates, for instance, after receiving a meager amount of payola, as reason dictates, is wrong! But have we considered how they find relief, alleviating their fears and struggles in an unforgiving environment? Have we considered how they are recognized once they are aligned, and attached, like leeches to powers that be?⁵⁷

Since the social character deals with psychic drives, our desires, fears, struggles, and ambitions have something to do with emotive or affectual engagements with the world. This is the reason why our critiques, protestations, and grievances, no matter how rationally justified they are, remain to be ineffective. As Wilde narrates, "thinking is not an exclusively intellectual process and that it is bound up with the entire character structure. Doctrines, ideals, or even individual concepts have an "emotional matrix" rooted in the character structure of the individual..."⁵⁸ The socio-structural arrangements that we have bind us emotionally to the system. As the system promises us survival and recognition, or a sense of belongingness, its very character taps into our deeper desires and emotional relations making us most likely to conform and become passive spectators. In this sense, the social change that we all radically envisioned, discussed, and debated is just, like that, a critique that failed to recognize social actors' daily and concrete experiences.⁵⁹ It is in those real and concrete daily encounters with the world that we perceive emotive or affectual relations. Since the social character deals with values and beliefs for survival and recognition, the quality of our relationships is always affectual.⁶⁰ It provides us with a direct evaluation of how things are in the world. What allures us, fascinates us, drives us, or makes us curious and approach the world? What disdains us, terrifies us, and thus, separates us from the world?⁶¹ All of these are matters of emotionally

⁵⁷ See Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, "A Psycho-Social Reflection on the Patrimonial Culture in the Philippines" in *Philosophia: An International Journal of Philosophy*, 23: 2 (June 2022): 282–297.

⁵⁸ See Wilde, *Erich Fromm and the Quest for Solidarity*, 20.

⁵⁹ See Bjorn Schiermer, "Acceleration and resonance: An interview with Hartmut Rosa. Four Generations of Critical Theory," in *Acta Sociologica* (2020), 1–7, <https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration_and_Resonance.pdf>.

⁶⁰ See Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, "Affectual Relations Reconsidered: The Primal Bond as a Lens for Social Transformation" in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26:1 (January 2025), 70–84

⁶¹ See Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions. The Myth and Nature of Human Emotions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Doubleday, 1976), 3.

charged drives which is tied to the characterology of our group, community, or society.⁶²

Thus, I maintain, that if we want to challenge the existing social order, we must not only fixate our energies on the rational or cognitive elements for social transformations. More than this, we need to deal with the emotional ties that strengthen and bind us to it. We need to look at the underlying social characterology so that we can integrate emotional resonance with our intellectual critique. We need to consider the dominant characterology, from which our emotions play a crucial role. It is the social character that emotively attaches us, aligning our dreams and aspirations to the systemic loop, that we want to change.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities
The Graduate School
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Abromeit, John, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- Brennan, Teresa, *Transmission of Affects* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- Contreras, Antonio, "The English professor is just one price we have to pay for turning higher education into a commodity" in *The Manila Times*, 18 May 2024), <<https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/05/18/opinion/columns/the-english-professor-is-just-one-price-we-have-to-pay-for-turning-higher-education-into-a-commodity/1947222>>.
- Damasio, Antonio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994).
- Dunn, Robert, *Identity Crisis: A Social Critique of Postmodernity*, (London: Minnesota Press, 1998).
- Freire, Paolo, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).
- Fromm, Erich, *Beyond the Chain of Illusion* (New York: Continuum, 2009).
- _____, *Fear of Freedom* (US: Farrar & Rhinehart, 1941).

⁶² Cf. Rodolfo Leyva, "On the Psychology and Libertarian Socialism of Erich Fromm: Towards an Empirically Based Psychological Retrofit" in Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, and Tricia M. Kress (eds.), *Reclaiming the Sane Society: Essays on Erich Fromm's Thought* (Rotterdam: Sense Publisher, 2014), 5.

- _____, "Man's Impulse Structure and Its Relation to Culture" in Erich Fromm, *Beyond Freud* (New York: American Mental Health Association, 2010).
- _____, *On Being Human* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 1999).
- _____, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1970).
- _____, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1963).
- _____, *The Sane Society* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955).
- Frosh, Stephen, *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and the Self*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1991).
- Fuchs, Thomas, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Funk, Ranier, "Erich Fromm's Concept of Social Character," in *Social Thought & Research* 21:1-2 (1998), 215-228 <www.jstor.org/ustlib.ust.edu/ph/action/doBasicSearch?Query=Rainer+Funk>.
- _____, "Erich Fromm's Concept of Social Character and Its Relevance for Clinical Practice," in M. Cortina and M. Maccoby (Eds.), *A Prophetic Analyst. Erich Fromm's Contribution to Psychoanalysis* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996).
- Heine, Steven J, *Cultural Psychology*, 3rd Edition (London: W.W. Norton, 2016).
- Huddy, Leonie, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- Kassab, Hanna Amir, *The Power of Emotion in Politics, Philosophy, and Ideology* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).
- Kingston, Rebecca and Leonard Ferry (eds.), *Bringing the Passion Back In* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2008).
- Langman, Lauren, and Lundskow, George, *God, Guns, Gold, and Glory: American Character and Its Discontents* (Boston: Brill, 2016).
- Leyva, Rodolfo, "On the Psychology and Libertarian Socialism of Erich Fromm: Towards an Empirically Based Psychological Retrofit." in Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, and Tricia M. Kress (eds.), *Reclaiming The Sane Society: Essays on Erich Fromm's Thought* (Rotterdam: Sense Publisher, 2014).
- Merton, Robert K, "Durkheim's Division of Labor in Society," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 40: 3 (Nov., 1934), 319-323.
- Miri, Syed Javad, Robert Lake, and Tricia M. Kress, (eds.), *Reclaiming The Sane Society: Essays on Erich Fromm's Thought* (Rotterdam: Sense Publisher, 2014).

- Mitchell, Stephen A., *Influence and Autonomy in Psychoanalysis* (London, Routledge, 2013).
- Pacquing, Ian Raymond B, "A Psycho-Social Reflection on the Patrimonial Culture in the Philippines" in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 23:2 (June 2022).
- _____, "Affectual Relations Reconsidered: The Primal Bond as a Lens for Social Transformation" in *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, 26:1 (January 2025).
- _____, "Reclaiming the World: Hartmut Rosa's Theory of Resonance" in *Philosophia: An International Journal of Philosophy*, 24:2 (June 2023).
- Rosa, Hartmut and William Scheuermann, *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity* (US: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).
- _____, *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship with the World*, Translated by James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).
- Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract*, trans. by Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- Schiermer, Bjorn, "Acceleration and resonance: An interview with Hartmut Rosa. Four Generations of Critical Theory," in *Acta Sociologica*, (Special Edition, 2020), 1–7, <https://journals.sagepub.com/pb-assets/cmscontent/ASJ/Acceleration_and_Resonance.pdf>.
- Solomon, Robert C, *The Passions. The Myth and Nature of Human Emotions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Doubleday, 1976).
- Szanto, Thomas and Hilge Landweer (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the Phenomenology of Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2020).
- Tenhouten, Warren D., *A General Theory of Emotions and Social Life* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
- Wilde, Lawrence, *Erich Fromm and the Quest for Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2005).
- Zima, Peter, *Subjectivity and Identity* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

Wallace, Cynthia R., *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion*¹

Paula Nicole C. Eugenio

Since the translation in English and publication of Weil's unfinished tragedy *Venice Saved*² in 2019, the attention to the connection between Simone Weil and Literature was brought to the forefront. Most of them focuses on the influence of Weil in literary theory and literature per se, specifically that of the works of Iris Murdoch. This is where Wallace's work differs as she explored the influence of Weil past Murdoch's existential ethics in literature. Wallace's careful selection of themes and authors to be included in this work proved to be a product of her deep intellectual engagement and critical understanding of literary and philosophic traditions. The book was divided into four chapters, three of which focus on the impact of Weil on individual author and the specific philosophical and ethical ideas that shaped their works, while the last chapter explicitly focuses on her influence on poetry and even the verse-biographies that was published in the past decades.

In the first chapter, Wallace focused on the political and ethical influence of Weil to Adrienne Rich. Rich has crafted this image that Weil is truly a philosopher of the oppressed, allowing her thoughts to enter the feminist scene in the 1970s, "despite the challenges of her philosophical and embodied self-emptying and her related turn to a kenotic Christianity."³ But unlike other scholars focusing on Rich's works, Wallace was careful not to concentrate on the 1970s feminism of Rich, as the decades that follow (1980–2012) have seen the maturation and deeper commitment of Rich to Weilian concepts such as "attention to human suffering, a clearsighted analysis of power in its many forms, a refusal of dehumanization and domination, a

¹ New York: Columbia University Press, 2024. 312pp.

² Simone Weil, *Venice Saved* trans by Silvia Panizza and Philip Wilson (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury, 2019).

³ Cynthia R. Wallace, *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), 34.

defense of the inseparable nature of theory and practice, an anti-capitalist and anticolonial critique of modern global politics, and an inescapable responsibility as citizen-philosopher.”⁴ Rich’s poetry showed a plethora of illustration of how Weil conceptualize justice—a central theme in her socio-political philosophy. Through the exploration of themes of marginalization and the search for truth, Rich’s work resonates Weil’s belief that justice is inextricable from the practice of attention and the recognition of others’ affliction. They both understand justice not just as a legal or political principle but also as an ethical commitment rooted in empathy and duty. The poetic survey of solidarity and resistance found in Rich’s poetry further strengthens Weil’s principle that justice necessitates both individual altruism and collective action in the face of social inequalities.

In the second chapter, the similarity of Annie Dillard and Simone Weil—specifically their love for religion and metaphysics—became the center of Wallace’s exploration. Unlike Rich, Dillard adapted many of Weil’s thoughts on religion and her mysticism. She was very much explicit in saying that Weil is a constant inspiration in all her works especially in the “long-form nonfiction trilogy, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, the first book, but also in the last, *For the Time Being* (1999), and intensively engages with her thought in the middle book, *Holy the Firm* (1977).”⁵ In these works, Dillard masterfully weaved metaphysical and theological treatises, sans her previous readings of Transcendentalist influences, whose metaphysics led to pantheism rather than Christian or Jewish discourse. It is in these works that Dillard shows her competence in weaving “Weil’s insistence on attending to the real—to things as they are—and to the problem of suffering”⁶ in literature. Dillard emphasizes what Weil has been discussing as the Stoic commitment to loving the world as it is and not how we imagine it to be—with its beauty and flaws altogether. Other scholars would see this as a total break from the religious notions of Weil—but Dillard was able to bridge this concept with that of Weil’s concepts found in *Waiting for God*.⁷

The third chapter explores Weil’s influence on Mary Gordon’s fiction. At the center of Wallace’s study, she focuses on Weil’s and Gordon’s tendency to question the Church.⁸ This is evident in many of her characters, as most of

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷ Weil discussed this very concept of loving the world with its imperfection in a chapter in *Waiting for God* with the title “Forms of the Implicit Love of God: Love of the Order of the World.” The second form of implicit love of God is the love of the order of the world. This pertains to the love that we have of the beauty of the universe; “by loving the order of the world we imitate the divine love which created the universe of which we are a part of.” See Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* trans by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2009), 99.

⁸ Wallace, *Literary Afterlives*, 123.

her stories include characters who turn away from religion. This generated a trope of generational shift from religious to areligious; the movement from strict religious observance to rejection of religion.⁹ In the three novels that Wallace selected in this section, she focuses on the interconnection of the concepts of sacrifice, the metaphor of hunger and thirst, and force. The works *Pearl* (2005), *Simone Weil in New York* (2014), and *There Your Heart Lies* (2017)—in different degrees show how Simone Weil’s concept of sacrifice and suffering plays in the present times. In these three works, sacrifice and suffering were considered in different ways other than just the religious sense but also includes representation of sacrifice and suffering in a secular sense. It highlights the role of force in the existence of suffering in this world. Most of the time, we associate force with violence—i.e. the use of force to coerce people to do things, to colonize, and even to “protect” oneself. For Weil, “force is what defines human condition; it is embedded in our nature.”¹⁰ In her work, *The Iliad or The Poem of Force*, she defines force as “that which turns anybody subjected to it into a thing.”¹¹ It is that which drives people to commit violence. Force is what allows one to forget her vulnerability. Dillard and Weil both agree that force is not something to be proud of—it is not something to boast about because “nobody really possesses it.”¹² Weil maintains that no one really benefits from using force, as she writes: “force is as pitiless to the man who thinks he possesses it, as it is to its victim; the latter it crushes, the former it intoxicates.”¹³ This notion of force is at the very core of affliction. It is the starting point of all forms of suffering. The dangers of violence, of colonization, of war—all of these are birthed from the notion of force. But the concept of force is also inherent in every human person. She maintains that “barbarity is a permanent and universal characteristic of human nature and develops more or less according to the circumstances that give it play.”¹⁴

In the last chapter, Wallace posed the question why poets seem to be fascinated in putting into verse the life of Simone Weil. This section seems to focus on the “sense of feminist urgency”¹⁵ to present the lives and works of early female writers to a broader audience. Poetry serves “as metaxu: they

⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰ See Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, 45. See also Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 41.

¹¹ Simone Weil, “The Iliad or The Poem of Force,” in *War and The Iliad: Simone Weil and Rachel Bespaloff*, trans. by Mary McCarthy (New York: NYREB, Inc., 2005), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Simone Weil, *Selected Essays, 1934-1943: Historical, Political, and Moral Writings* trans. by Richard Rees (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 142-144.

¹⁵ Wallace, *Literary Afterlives*, 175.

connect readers to Weil even as they distance us from her.”¹⁶ Wallace contends that the paradox that plagued the philosophy and life of Weil—her presence and absence, her dedication and detachment—is also the paradox that connects us to her—even to the point of making us closer to her across time. These paradoxes are best represented by the poems and poets she included in this work. These engagement of poetry with Weil’s life emphasizes also the need to decreate the “I”. There is a need to decreate the “I” because it obscures our perspectives and the only way “to escape from the errors of false perspective is to carry one’s heart beyond space, beyond the world, to God.”¹⁷ This establishes that decreation becomes the very challenge that Weil’s life posed for us to be ethical.

The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil offers a multifaceted discussion on why Weil’s ideas persist to be important in understanding the ethical and aesthetic concerns of modern literature. Wallace’s work invites readers to re-evaluate the intersections of literature, philosophy, and feminism, while also emphasizing the essential part of literature in forming our moral and spiritual imaginations.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center of Culture, Arts, and the Humanities
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Irwin, Alexander, *Saints of the Impossible* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- McCullough, Lisa, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil* (London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
- Wallace, Cynthia R., *The Literary Afterlives of Simone Weil: Feminism, Justice, and the Challenge of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).
- Weil, Simone, “The Iliad or The Poem of Force,” in *War and The Iliad: Simone Weil and Rachel Bernaloff* trans. by Mary McCarthy (New York: NYREB, Inc., 2005).
- _____, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. by Arthur Wills and John Petrie (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2001).
- _____, *Selected Essays, 1934-1943: Historical, Political, and Moral Writings*, trans. by Richard Rees (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁷ See Lisa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil* (London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 177.

_____, *Venice Saved*, trans. by Silvia Panizza and Philip Wilson (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury, 2019).

_____, *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2009).

Book Review

**Wiitala, Michael (Ed.),
*Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy:
A Critical Guide*¹**

Jovito V. Cariño

Besides the death anniversary of Thomas Aquinas, the year 2024 also marked the passing of two other major Catholic thinkers, namely, Bonaventure (d. 1274) and Boethius (d. 524). This review of a recently published book on Boethius' masterpiece, *Consolation of Philosophy* (along with Joshua Cedric Gundayao's review of a book on Bonaventure in this issue of *Kritike*) is a modest, though belated, memorial to the legacy of these pillars of Catholic thought.

Apart from Augustine, Isidore of Seville and John Scotus of Eriugena, Boethius counts as one among the influential figures who helped shape the medieval Catholic intellectual culture. His works on logic as well as his theological treatises served as source books for scholars long before the introduction of Aristotle to the then emergent European universities. Today, Boethius is known among students and enthusiasts of medieval philosophy for his swan song, *Consolation of Philosophy*. Despite its sustained popularity, however, from the early middle ages down to our time, experts and lay readers alike remain divided as to the real worth and character of this Boethian opus. Many are torn as to whether it is a philosophic text advancing a subtle critique of Christian faith or a Christian literature exposing the pretensions of philosophy. Another disputed topic is whether it is an homage to Neoplatonic thought or a lamentation over its futility in the face of severe adversity. In other words, like all other philosophic greats, the *Consolation of Philosophy* inspires more questions than the answers it offers. This new guide from the Cambridge University Press, edited by Michael Wiitala, intends to shed light on the abovementioned issues and other related interpretive concerns.

¹ Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024, 254pp.

The book is divided into 13 chapters. Chapters 1–3 take up the relation between the *Consolation's* literary elements and its philosophic content. Chapters 4 and 5 weigh in on the question of Boethius' attitude towards Christianity. Chapters 6–8 focus on Boethius' philosophical anthropology and views on selfhood. Chapters 9–13 are devoted to metaphysical and theological themes of eternity, providence, human free will and divine foreknowledge.

The book's initial three chapters attempted to highlight the *Consolation's* merit both as a literary and a philosophic text. In the first essay, John Magee² examined an interesting theory (put forward by Hermann Tränkle in 1977) purporting that the *Consolation* was an unfinished work, which means it had some parts left unwritten by Boethius on account of his untimely death. Tränkle apparently based his reading on the exhortation of Lady Philosophy (Book V, 6.47–8) which he interpreted as a prompt for a potential response from Boethius. In his view, such response, had it materialized, would have given Book V its fitting end similar to the final parts of the three main books of the *Consolation*, Books II–IV, which were all concluded in verse. Tränkle went as far as saying that the *Consolation* was supposed to have been capped by an imagined "Book VI." He saw this suggested by the questions about the soul's immortality and the punishment in the afterlife raised in Book IV, 4.23. The absence of satisfactory answers to these questions led him to conjure the possibility of a "Book VI" which would have laid out their resolution. Magee disputed Tränkle's reading by citing the study made by Joachim Gruber. Gruber's exposition of the *Consolation's* metric distribution as well as its balanced and holistic philosophic architecture refuted Tränkle's erroneous suppositions. Boethius' neat assimilation of the teachings of both Plato and Aristotle, delivered through the counsels of Lady Philosophy, was another factor against Tränkle. His systematic appropriation of the two Greek philosophers was yet another demonstration of the *Consolation's* organic symmetry.

As a literary piece, the *Consolation* took much from Plato's *Phaedo*. Both texts featured (1) heroic philosophers (2) at the final hours of their lives (3) after they were accused and incarcerated (4) on the basis of trumped up charges; (5) both of them likewise viewed their impending death as some sort of philosophic experience. Siobhan Nash-Marshall noted how both Plato and Boethius perceived philosophy (and by extension, immortality) as a passage from Π to θ , that is, from the world of materiality (symbolized by the Greek alphabet Π) to the loftier realm of the metaphysical and divine reality

² John Magee, "Chapter 1, Boethius' *Philosophiae consolatio*: The Intersection of Literary Form and Philosophical Content," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Michael Wiitala (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 12–31.

(represented by the Greek alphabet θ).³ While there were stark differences between the structural features of *Phaedo* and the *Consolation*, as well as between Socrates (the main character of *Phaedo*) and the character Boethius in the *Consolation*, the reader, nonetheless, would readily see the agreement between the two texts on seeing the challenges posed by the world of Π not as hindrances to but as requisites of the attainment of happiness which only θ could bestow. Thanks to these challenges, which are analogous to mental paradoxes and abstract problems, one is able to develop and perfect the habits required by the ascent to philosophic contemplation. As it appears, scaling the philosophical ladder to θ is not just a matter of going beyond but going through the world of Π .

In the third essay, Wendy Elgersma Helleman⁴ explored Boethius' distinct use of *allegorical personification* both as a literary and pedagogical tool to highlight the key attributes of philosophy embodied by the figure of Lady Philosophy. Rather than adopting the more common *allegorical interpretation* popularized by the Stoics, Boethius chose to assign a distinct allegorical feminine persona to philosophy following its antecedents in his Greek and Roman predecessors like Homer, Plato, Cicero, Augustine and Martianus Capella. What made Lady Philosophy's persona peculiar however was her being neither human nor divine. Boethius the author made it clear, from the moment she was introduced at the opening book of the *Consolation*, that she was not an object of worship, like Athena or Minerva, nor some muse who could sway the mind and imagination of an author like Boethius. Had she possessed such power, she would not have had difficult time winning Boethius to her side. When she came in, she was described as wearing torn garments, advanced in age, and with a look that was less than comely. Boethius considered her as his nurse, physician and teacher (akin to Lady Continence in the Book VIII of Augustine's *Confessions*). Some Boethian commentators like Donato considered it problematic that *philosophia* was subordinated to *sapientia* which, according to him, was restricted to Christian theology. This view was contested by Helleman since the text of the *Consolation* did not warrant such reading. She was convinced that in Boethius' mind and the text of the *Consolation* itself, *sapientia* coincided with *philosophia* (represented by Lady Philosophy herself) following the tradition inherited by Boethius from the likes of Cicero and Augustine. Helleman's tangential reference to philosophy's relation with Christianity provided a

³ Siobhan Nash-Marshall, "The Ascent from Π to θ , or On Philosophy's Teaching a Blind Man to See," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 32–45.

⁴ Wendy Elgersma Helleman, "Lady Philosophy as a Feminine Personification of Wisdom," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 46–67.

good transition to the next pair of chapters which dealt with the authenticity of the religious and philosophic character of Boethius and his *Consolation*.

The question of whether or not the *Consolation* is a Christian text and its author, a Christian writer, has attracted the interest of many a scholar since the early medieval period until today. What Claudio Moreschini⁵ did in his paper was to revisit this debate, in particular, the views of those commentators who strongly doubted the Christian stature of either Boethius and his classic opus. Among the medieval commentators, Moreschini cited the works of Bovo of Corvey, Einsiedlensis, and Adalboldus of Utrecht (published in the 1954 edition of Huygens' critical commentary). While these medieval authors did not question Boethius' Christian faith, they nonetheless detected in the *Consolation* certain strands of philosophic views which ran counter to the traditional Christian teachings. The skeptical attitude towards Boethius' Christianity extended up to the modern period, particularly in such commentators like Charles Jourdain (1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1860) who considered unChristian not just the *Consolation* but also Boethius' theological treatises. Their contention was opposed to that of François Armand Gervaise (1715) who saw in the *Consolation* certain parallelism between Lady Philosophy and Christ. The general suspicion regarding Boethius' relation with Christianity, including the religious authenticity of the *Consolation*, prevailed until today despite the more moderate and conciliatory testimonies of such scholars like Anna Crabbe ("Literary Design in the *De consolazione philosophiae*," 1981) and Henry Chadwick (*Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, 1981). It is important to note that while Chadwick acknowledged the fusion of Christianity and Neoplatonism in the *Consolation*, the text was for him more Neoplatonic than Christian. For their part, critics such as Alain Galonnier and Danuta Shanzer continued to uphold a secular, even anti-Christian reading of Boethius and the *Consolation*. Their brand of hermeneutic originated from Pierre Courcelle who introduced it in the 1960s. An alternative reading could be found in John Marenbon who thought of the *Consolation* as a reproduction of a Menippean satire that was devised to downplay the consoling function of philosophy and play up Christianity's superior efficacy. Moreschini took exception to the secular and anti-Christian readings of the *Consolation* on account of their fundamental oversight. Such secular and anti-Christian interpretations would only hold water if Boethius' philosophic thought could be isolated from his Christian faith. Moreschini pointed out, however, that the divide between philosophy and Christianity attributed to Boethius was simply non-existent; it was probably true for other thinkers but not for Boethius and not for the Greco-

⁵ Claudio Moreschini, "Boethius' Christianity in the *Consolatio*: A History of the Debate," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 68–81.

Roman culture of his time. Scholars such as Fabio Troncarelli and Claudio Micaelli emphasized the same assertion. For Moreschini, any argument about the Christianity of Boethius and the *Consolation* rises and falls on the basis of this normative historical and cultural givens.

Moreschini's conclusion was further bolstered by the insights of Renato de Filippis.⁶ In his study, de Filippis maintained that the *Consolation* was a fine work showcasing Boethius' successful reconciliation of Christianity with Neoplatonism. The harmony between pagan elements and Christian religion was best demonstrated in Book III where Lady Philosophy and the character Boethius turned to the theme of happiness. It thus served as a focal point around which Boethius organized his ideas drawn from various pagan sources such as Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, Neoplatonism including the Latin Neoplatonist, Macrobius. He also tapped other Christian authors, especially those who had ably demonstrated in their works the convergence between Christianity and pagan philosophy like Augustine, Apuleius, Calcidius and the Greek Fathers. The Bible itself was cited, albeit only once, in the paraphrase of Wisdom 8:1 towards the end of Book III. de Filippis argued that the singular reference, contrary to the opinions of other critics, did not diminish the Christian merit of the *Consolation*. What mattered, in his view, was the way Boethius used it as a capstone of his argument for the divine governance of the entire creation. Christianity's affinity with pagan philosophy complemented too Boethius' firm belief in the theoretical harmony between Plato and Aristotle. His demonstration of such enabled him to achieve what Marenbon described as Boethius' "unparadigmatic originality."

From the discussion of the *Consolation's* religious character, the succeeding three chapters took up the question of Boethius' notions of philosophical anthropology and selfhood. This was bannered by Mark K. Spencer's essay which reconstructed the general contours of Boethian anthropology based on the *Consolation's* text.⁷ Boethius' anthropological views could be read in the *Consolation* but his more foundational ideas about the human person were actually located in his Trinitarian and Aristotelian treatises. What was significant in Spencer's account was the way he framed his exposition of Boethian anthropology within the context of the problem presented by the *Consolation*, that is, Boethius' forgetfulness of his true nature and his eventual recovery of the same via his union with the source of his being: God. One could readily notice in such intimation the Platonic and

⁶ Renato de Filippis, "The Blending of Pagan and Christian Elements in Book III of the *Consolation*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 82–97.

⁷ Mark K. Spencer, "The Human Person in the *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 98–115.

Neoplatonic texture of Boethius' itinerary. While he was willing to admit the unity between body and soul, Boethius nonetheless maintained that the human person was primarily a soul and thus, its perfection lies in deification via participation.

Spencer's emphasis on Boethius' espousal of deification via participation is important in understanding the latter's abiding intellectual affinity with Neoplatonic philosophy which he maintained without abandoning his creedal commitment to Christianity. Antonio Donato also made the same argument in his presentation of Boethius' notion of the self.⁸ In Donato's account, Boethius reckoned the self mainly in Neoplatonic terms. For the Neoplatonists, the self is not just an individual, that is, an "I," but a "we." This means that the self is actually a composite of two natures, the higher (the divine) nature and the lower (the material) nature. Between the two, the material nature is more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life and hence, more prone to weakness. Boethius' own bitter fate illustrates the outcome of a material life gone wrong; this kind of tragedy, however, may be overcome via patient self-examination. The act of self-examination opens the path towards the recovery of the divine self. Such philosophic practice harks back to Plato's injunction to "know yourself." The *Consolation* as a text is a performance of Boethius' self-examination. It adopts the Platonic form of dialogue and preserves the character of *consolation* as a philosophic genre. What makes Boethius' *Consolation* unique though is its showcase of self-consolation instead of consolation traditionally offered by another person to someone else. Donato suggested Boethius might have resorted to such literary strategy in order to foreground the personal and mainly interior dynamics of overcoming inner conflicts en route to one's ultimate fulfillment, that is, deification.

The meaning of deification or becoming God was addressed by Paul DiRado in the succeeding essay.⁹ Boethius' problem of forgetfulness as to who he really was or what was his true identity was ultimately resolved when Boethius recalled, through the heuristic intervention of the visiting mistress, that he had a divine nature. In saying so, Lady Philosophy did not mean that Boethius was God himself but that he was a participant in God's own divinity. It took some effort before Boethius accepted the positive impact of this reminder given the inconsolable circumstances he was in. There was really nothing remotely Godlike when one is unjustly punished on account of false accusations. Lady Philosophy had to painstakingly instruct him how

⁸ Antonio Donato, "Self-Investigation, Self-Knowledge, and Inner Conflict in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 116–134.

⁹ Paul DiRado, "What It Means to Be a God: Providence and Punishment in the *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 135–152.

punishment could also lead to happiness and good. The average opinion would not associate punishment with happiness and good; only when one repositions his view, from the plane that is merely human to the level of the divine, that he could appreciate how trials, like Boethius' own, could also be a passage to happiness and good, and ultimately, to God. Happiness, good and unity are primary traits of God which, in DiRado's rehearsal of Lady Philosophy's arguments, could be attained via the therapeutic consolation of philosophy.

That such consolation is attributed to philosophy must be taken with a grain of salt. Thomas Jürgasch¹⁰ explained that while philosophy had a key role in the search for and attainment of the consolation sought by Boethius, it was not itself the source of such consolation. In other words, philosophy was mainly an instrumental resource and not primarily an originary cause. Such cause was none other than God who was described by Boethius as the *summum bonum* or supreme good. The attribute of God as the *summum bonum* had a very rich pedigree dating back to Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Augustine. The conventional reading often pairs Boethius' philosophic leaning in the *Consolation* with Plato, Plotinus and Augustine. For Jürgasch, however, Boethius' recognition of the instrumental role of philosophy vis-à-vis union with the *summum bonum* puts him in a position closer to Aristotle than any of the three aforementioned thinkers. Boethius followed the lead of Aristotle in asserting that the *summum bonum* as the ultimate principle was not necessarily beyond the reach of human reason. It was in fact through Boethius' own reunion with philosophy that he found the path towards God after momentarily forgetting his innate bond with the divine.

The theological treatment of good, taken as *summum bonum* in Jürgasch's essay, was matched by a philosophical discussion of good in Michael Wiitala's contribution.¹¹ Wiitala's point of departure was Lady Philosophy's demonstration in Book III of the existence of a complete good. The choice of this argument in this particular segment of the *Consolation* is crucial to Wiitala's aim of proving that the meaning of the Latin verbs *esse* / *existere* were not similar to the modern notions of existence which often take it in a binary and univocal sense, that is, as a matter mainly of existing or non-existing. Construing Lady Philosophy's argument for the existence of a complete good in the modern sense would do damage to the cogency of her point. In other words, to ask whether the existence of a complete good is possible when it is in fact already existing makes for a muddled presentation

¹⁰ Thomas Jürgasch, "Consolation through Philosophical Insight?: Boethius' Practical Philosophy," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 153–168.

¹¹ Michael Wiitala, "Being and Existence in the *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 169–185.

of an important claim. To remedy this quandary, Wiitala proposed a retrieval of the meaning of *esse* / *existere* from within the context of Boethian literature, specifically, the *Consolation* and the theological treatises where Boethius took *esse* to mean "to be intelligible" and *existere*, "to be manifest." With that in mind, Lady Philosophy's attempt to convince Boethius of the existence of the complete good would appear more coherent.

Keeping up with the metaphysical and theological themes of the last five essays, Vladimir Cvetković undertook in his paper an imposing comparative presentation of the thoughts of Boethius (specifically in his *Consolation*) and Pseudo-Dionysius.¹² Though the two were near contemporaries, rarely anyone would find studies highlighting their intersection or any evidence indicating that they, in any way, influenced one another. Due to their common allegiance to Christianity and Neoplatonism, however, the affinity between their philosophic and theological grammar, not to mention, their central ideas, is hard to overlook. For one, both of them agreed on the threefold manner of describing God, that is, God as substance; God as his own activity; and God as participated by human creatures. This connaturality was also displayed in their use of linear, circular and spiral metaphors to describe either God or God's relation with his creation. Borrowing the Neoplatonic language popularized by Proclus, they used linear motion to refer to procession, circular motion to remaining, and spiral motion to reversion. Unlike Boethius though, who was devoted to understanding God and his relation to the universe, Pseudo-Dionysius focused his use of spherical metaphors in his contemplation of the nature of God himself. Needless to say, the recognition of the interface between the two is crucial in appreciating the Neoplatonic roots of Christian philosophic and theological traditions.

The last two essays of the book should be read in conjunction with one another. Jonathan Evans' piece dealt with the problem of time as Boethius presented it in the *Consolation*.¹³ He recognized Boethius' contribution to the philosophic discussion of time though he also admitted that the latter's insights on such theme were far from comparable with what could be gathered from either Aristotle or Augustine. Boethius, after all, confronted the question of time neither as a topic of cosmology nor physics but as a corollary of his main interests: human free will and divine foreknowledge. Given the tension between the human temporal domain where everything is subject to change and the realm of divine eternity

¹² Vladimir Cvetković, "Circle and Sphere Metaphors for God's Nature and Providence in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Dionysius' *On Divine Names*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 186–201.

¹³ Jonathan Evans, "Time and Eternity in the *Consolation of Philosophy*," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 202–219.

characterized by changelessness, Boethius could not help but wrestle with the puzzle inherent in time; he wanted a better way of explaining how the transitory nature of human affairs could fit in the fixed and eternal laws ordained by God himself. Since Evans limited his discussion mainly to the technical aspect of time based on the textual parameters of the *Consolation*, readers would find the Boethian solution to this problem not in his paper but in the final essay of Katherin Rogers.¹⁴ In her study, Rogers argued for Boethius' version of *theist compatibilism* (which basically means human freedom is not undermined by the human person's causal relation with God) and how this was, all along, the leit motif of the *Consolation*. The theory itself was not named as such by Boethius but it represented the fundamental stance he subscribed to all throughout. Against the contrary reading of Marenbon who suggested that Lady Philosophy's defense of the sovereignty of divine will in Book V weakened Boethius' defense of human freedom, Rogers contended that such defense served as a fitting climax to an argument which Boethius was consciously building up since the early stages of his dialogue with Lady Philosophy.

This critical guide does live up to its title. Besides insightful commentaries and incisive critique, another edge that marks this book is the individual authors' top-notch scholarship and lucid discussion. Anyone aspiring either to be introduced to or be reacquainted with Boethius or his *Consolation* will definitely find this text an indispensable help.

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center for Theology, Religious Studies, and Ethics
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

Reference

Wiitala, Michael (ed.), *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

¹⁴ Katherin Rogers, "Boethius on Human Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge," in *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, 220–234.

Book Review

Shelby, Katherine Wrisley, *Spiraling into God: Bonaventure on Grace, Hierarchy, and Holiness*¹

Joshua Cedric A. Gundayao

Giovanni di Fidanza, or Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1217-1274), was one of the authoritative figures in the Franciscan Order that defined its philosophical and theological tradition. Schooled at the University of Paris, Bonaventure learned directly from Alexander of Hales, the preeminent Franciscan theologian of that time. Preceding his stint at the University, there had been disputes among the Franciscans regarding the education of the friars of the Poverello regarding the seeming contradiction between the Franciscan spirituality of poverty with utter dependence on God and the scholarly pursuits of theology. Although it had not been thoroughly addressed, the conflict between studying theology and living out the Franciscan spirituality was put to rest when Francis permitted Anthony of Padua to teach theology, given that they did not extinguish their spiritual and prayer lives due to their studies. This disagreement among the Franciscans regarding the issue was finally put to rest when Bonaventure entered the order, specifically when he became its Minister General in 1257. This is because Bonaventure was able to show the necessity of academic life to genuinely understand the intricacies of Franciscan spirituality. After all, in Bonaventure, contrary to what some scholars would argue, it is not his identity as a Franciscan that shaped his intellectual framework; instead, it is his scholarly training that structured how he understood, lived, and bore witness to his Franciscan identity. From this standpoint, I wish to frame my reading of Bonaventure's philosophy as explained thematically by Katherine Wrisley Shelby in her book *Spiraling into God: Bonaventure on Grace, Hierarchy, and Holiness*.

The book is divided into 9 chapters where Shelby focuses on grace, hierarchy, and holiness as the conceptual grounding of her reading of Bonaventurian metaphysics. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction, chapters

¹ Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2023, 391pp

2-5 focuses on the relationship of grace and hierarchy, chapters 6-8 on the connection between the two concepts and holiness, and Chapter 9 is the conclusion. The three aforementioned principles were crucial for the Bonaventurian metaphysics that culminates in the perfection of the human person with and in God. Despite the postlapsarian stature, *reditus* (return) is enabled by grace, which hierarchizes the human person. This hierarchization, in turn, advances the attainment of holiness, thereby resulting in the *reditus* or *reductio* in and into God. Contrary to how other Bonaventurian scholars would interpret and equate Bonaventure's metaphysics to the Dionysian circle, Shelby asserted that the human person, albeit ensues a descend and ascend motion in the *exitus et reductus* (procession and return), spirals back to an unending subsequent descent and ascent progression.² More specifically, *reditus* is not an end-point but a new beginning for a nuanced *exitus* so that the human person will be all the more hierarchized.³

Typically, Bonaventurian scholarship considers Augustine as Bonaventure's most influential figure. However, in tracing Bonaventure's historical sources for the doctrine of grace, Shelby surprisingly excluded the authority of Augustine. It was unexpected because, in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, the third and fourth stages of the hierarchical ascent revolved around the human person, specifically on the internal journey of examining the soul, which was rooted in Augustine, as a form of a higher ascent before passing over to the speculation of God. In examining the concept of grace, Shelby argued that it was Bonaventure's teacher, Alexander of Hales, who significantly contributed, together with Dionysius the Areopagite and the Victorine Thomas Gallus, in forming how his conception of grace.

Dionysius the Areopagite was the first to coin the word "hierarchy" in the early sixth century. From his perspective, hierarchy is a sacred order that is not associated with the degree of authority but with proximity toward God, and the end of hierarchy is to ensure that everyone will reach the summit—thereby facilitating the hierarchization of the soul.⁴ The soul can only be hierarchized once it is purified, illuminated, and perfected. Through these hierarchical movements that relate to order, understanding, and activity, all rational creatures are ordered back to God as their Creator.⁵ Shelby argued through this that Dionysius was able to reappropriate the late-Neoplatonic notion of *residuus* (remaining), *exitus*, and *reditus*.

² Katherine Wrisley Shelby, *Spiraling into God: Bonaventure on Grace, Hierarchy, and Holiness* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 111.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32–34.

Another important source of Bonaventure was Thomas Gallus, a master at the University of Paris sometime between 1210 and 1218 and one among the last great Victorines, articulated a reappropriation of the Dionysian hierarchy employing his angelic anthropology, viz. the nine orders of the celestial hierarchy. For Gallus, like in his Angelic Hierarchy, there are three main orders (lowest, middle, and highest) in the mind that hierarchize the soul.⁶ In the soul's ascent in this hierarchy, it becomes receptive to the divine light that perfects it at the highest level of the seraph. What is unique here is the necessity for the soul, once it culminates in the level of the seraph, to make descent so that the divine light achieved through the ascent will fecundate to those at the lower hierarchy.⁷

This nuanced understanding of hierarchy was elaborated further by the former Franciscan chair of theology, Alexander of Hales, who supplied Bonaventure with necessary lens, providing the soul the perspective of sanctifying grace—grace that "purifies, illuminates, and perfects," thereby hierarchizing the soul.⁸ For Hales, there are two distinct categories of grace: uncreated grace, which pertains to the Holy Spirit, and created grace that God infuses into the human soul. For Hales, created grace is associated with sanctifying grace, which hierarchizes that soul and consequently disposes the rational soul to receive the uncreated grace.⁹ Once the soul is hierarchized, it transitions from being a mere vestige of God to a similitude.

The developing notion of hierarchy was thus refined by Bonaventure by establishing the concept of *influentia* and by qualifying the positionality of the hierarchized soul. First, Bonaventure considered Hales' sanctifying grace as *influential*, continuously proceeding from the First principle to sustain the existence of creatures. This then serves as a guide in the ascent by hierarchizing the soul so that *reditus* might be achieved.¹⁰ Second, he further asserted that once the soul is hierarchized, its positionality should not be a mere *status* or an idle remaining in God, but a *fructus* whereby the soul—and the human person by extension—not only orders one's relation with God but also makes it fruitful by including the entire created order of reality.¹¹ This makes the human person a Jacob's Ladder that assists others so that the rest of the creature can ascend into the hierarchy.¹² This Jacob's Ladder that was used to symbolize the hierarchized rational soul was taken from Jacob's dream where God's angels used it to descend and ascend from heaven and

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48–49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100–101.

¹² *Ibid.*, 111.

earth, thereby connecting the Heaven and Earth.¹³ Like Jacob's Ladder, all creatures can also ascend through the hierarchized soul.

In structuring Bonaventure's concept of grace and tracing its intellectual sources, Shelby established how all creatures are linked in two ways, vestige and *influentia*. Shelby claimed that for Bonaventure, all of creation is a vestige through the general inflowing from the Trinity, whereby all creatures are sustained in their existence and are ordered back to God.¹⁴ However, a different consideration applies to rational creatures, for the soul can transcend this vestige to be a similitude of God by cooperating with sanctifying grace.¹⁵ However, this should be clarified so as not to fall into an anthropocentric reading of Bonaventure. For him, the capacity to attain similitude is given to the rational creature so that, as a result, it can help those at the lower hierarchy. From this interpretation, genuine appreciation of deification points to the socio-ethical *fructus* inherent in the soul's ascent. As it becomes more similitude to God, it becomes responsible for those who are not. All in the created order are also connected through general *influentia* that sustains all creatures' existence.¹⁶

Shelby further explains that this *Influentia* received by all creatures from the creator is classified into general and special. The former refers to the *influentia* shared by all in the created order, while the latter is solely infused into rational creatures. General *influentia* accounts for why all creatures are a vestige of God as their creator and ongoing source of existence; due to this, God's power is manifested in all creatures from the level of vestige. This *influentia* connects all in the created order by placing everything within a hierarchy of perfection. However, *influentia* operates differently in the rational soul, which receives the second type of *influentia* in addition to the general one. This special *influentia* facilitates the soul's progression from being a vestige to the state of similitude, allowing it to become like Jacob's Ladder so that all creatures can likewise ascend into the hierarchy.¹⁷ After all, the rational soul can truly return to God provided that it becomes like Jacob's Ladder. As a Jacob's Ladder it can connect creatures with God by both ascending to God and descending to the rest of the creatures, so that they, too, can ascend back to God.¹⁸ However, this is not to misconstrue that the rational soul is the mediator between God and the rest of creation for there is only one mediator, Christ. What Shelby is arguing in the foregoing is that Christ, as the "Hierarch," is the one who enables the ascents, descents, and

¹³ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101–102.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 303.

reascents to God, without which the human person cannot be hierarchized.¹⁹ Therefore, a meaningful reading of the rational soul as Jacob's Ladder should include Christ as the source of all the movements within the hierarchy.

Tracing Bonaventure's concept of hierarchy can demonstrate an alternative perspective as to how people of the contemporary world understand hierarchy. In contrast to the modern pejorative reading of hierarchy, Bonaventure considers hierarchy as an avenue through which the rational soul becomes potent to perfection. Through the *influencia* of grace, the rational soul can ascent into the hierarchy and thereby attain perfection through the ecstatic union with God, simply put, holiness. For we only become capable of holiness once we cooperate with this *influencia* so that our soul will be hierarchized, becoming like Jacob's Ladder that spirals between God and the other creatures at the lower level of the hierarchy.²⁰

Shelby's discussions of hierarchy concerning grace as *influencia* and holiness as its end direct us to the idea that although the primary ascent of the soul is somehow a solitary activity insofar as it is attained through the will in cooperation with grace, it is always relational and directed towards *fructus*. A more faithful reading of hierarchization is not for the sake of the soul *per se* but is done in relation to other creatures that also need to be hierarchized. This reading of hierarchy is faithful to how Bonaventure pursues knowledge. That knowledge is sought not for its own sake but for the sake of its source—God the *Summum Bonum*. Bonaventure pursued knowledge not for its own sake but for the sake of something higher, something perfect. Intellectual life is important, not because it constitutes the ultimate end of the human person nor serves as the sole mechanism for attaining perfection. Rather, for Bonaventure, its significance lies in its capacity to lead and aid the human person in our journey toward our true and ultimate end, thus fulfilling the metaphysical goal embedded in each creature.²¹ Thus, if one is to look at his works, each is fashioned so that his fellow Franciscans will deepen their intellectual life and how they live the spirituality they are called for. Each work for Bonaventure is not published for purely intellectual and scholarly need and satisfaction but a work meant to guide each reader on how to pursue the life everyone is meant to live, the life of perfection and holiness—a life perfected by circling back to the Ultimate source. That knowledge of the truth will not confine us to ourselves but rather predispose us to cooperate with *influencia* so that we can be deified and help others be deified.

This book is invaluable if one wishes to know more about the historical constitution of Bonaventure's concept of hierarchy and its interplay

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 280.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

with grace and holiness. Moreover, it presents biblical and uses historical figures as exemplars of a hierarchized soul and its theological implications on trinitarian theology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, social and environmental justice, and wisdom theology. However, a more holistic understanding of Bonaventure's hierarchy could be strengthened if the mystical and contemplative nature of the hierarchy was also taken into account. This is important for Bonaventure since speculation is not just a mere ascent of the rational soul nor a sapiential ascent but an intellectual and contemplative ascent. Through the discussion of contemplation, *influentia* could be further highlighted as initiated by the Trinity and not part of the nature of the rational soul. Nonetheless, the book will provide foundational knowledge on Bonaventure if one wants to understand Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* from the vantage point of hierarchy, grace, and holiness.

*Department of Philosophy
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

Reference

Shelby, Katherine Wrisley, *Spiraling into God: Bonaventure on Grace, Hierarchy, and Holiness* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

Book Review

Giles, James, *The Way of Awareness in Daoist Philosophy*¹

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland

All alumni of the UST undergraduate and graduate philosophy programs pre-K-12 transitions would have a grasp of Chinese Philosophy, ranging from Chinese Philosophy at the baccalaureate level or Confucianism or even Comparative Philosophy at the graduate level. Encountering these subjects comes with the amazement of learning ancient wisdom from the East yet also with the daunting experiences in the classroom—particularly the scores at the end of each gruesome quiz or exam. This may immediately repel aspiring scholars from the broad topic of Chinese Philosophy or make others more inclined to Confucianism due to the more immediate associations and sound arguments bestowed in the lectures. Yet, it is concerning this experience that the current book under review, James Giles' *The Way of Awareness in Daoist Philosophy*, provides a fresh breeze into learning Chinese Philosophy. As the title of the book suggests, it provides a way of awareness through the Daoist school, or, perhaps better, the *Dao* of awareness, the way or the *nature* of clarity. Central to the book's seven chapters (with a preface and epilogue) is a progression of topics that invites the readers to situate themselves to what philosophy is within the Daoist tradition, and introducing awareness to the readers is no easy feat, considering how Daoism is generally equated to mysticism and frivolity, especially when contrasted to the Confucian praise of rituals and filial piety.²

The first chapter works on the brief historical overview contained in the preface, covering this time the intellectual pursuits of the context. Though the discussion begins with the Period of Warring States, what broadens one's understanding is the common element among schools of thought; the *Book of Changes* or the *Yijing* (易经) contains the terms that are usually discussed more

¹ St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Publishing, 2020, 205pp.

² See James Giles, *The Way of Awareness in Daoist Philosophy* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Publishing, 2020), viii.

in the different schools, such as Daoism's *dao* (道) and *de* (德) with Confucianism's *junzi* (君子).³ This sets the background for the entire chapter's discussion of Kong Zi, Meng Zi, Xun Zi, Mo Zi, and even Han Fei Zi and the legalists.

The second chapter begins laying the foundation of Daoist scholarship, particularly discussing three concepts from Lao Zi, namely the Way, return, and non-action. The interesting choice of Giles to choose to work with the English title of the *Daodejing* (道德经) or the *Laozi* (老子) as *The Way and Its Power*, provides a different perspective for the reader. Opting to use this poetic title might vex some Daoist scholars, but this allows one to focus more on the content of the book – the interplay between *De* and *Dao*, between Virtue and the Way – rather than simply the book's literary and philosophical contents. This excitement may especially be true for neophytes, immediately invoking in one's mind Nietzsche's will to power, which Giles hints at their difference.⁴ Lao Zi's philosophy for Giles evokes the "stillness of awareness" that resembles a "metaphysics of awareness, an account where awareness is not distinct from its objects[.]"⁵ And this discussion provides the backbone for the entire discussion of Daoism in this book.

While discussion on Daoism might immediately proceed to Zhuang Zi after Lao Zi, Giles considers first the association of Yang Zhu's philosophy to Daoism, which is central to the third chapter, and reserving Zhuang Zi for the fourth. Though a scholar not central to usual discussions of Daoism, Yang Zhu is considered by Giles as a thinker who puts forward a distinctly Daoist way of awareness. His take on egoism and fatalism are central to his own understanding of the Way. This ultimately points to Yang Zhu's disregard of arbitrary selections found in life and an emphasis upon the freedom present in living authentically, found best in Yang Zhu's rejection of sacrificing a part of his body (a hair) for the wellbeing of the state.⁶ This regard of the self in fact points to a higher awareness of an individual's freedom, "the freedom to follow our natural leanings without hindrance."⁷

Allowing things to flow is the same theme found in *wei wu ziran* (无为自然) in the philosophy of Zhuang Zi that takes a prominent position in the fourth chapter. Giles takes on this thinker not just of the accustomed passages of his book, such as the Butterfly Dream, but rather selects other passages for deeper consideration, such as the dialogue with Nie Que (啮缺) on an individual sleeping on a damp place (found in *Qi Wu Lun*, the second chapter

³ See *Ibid.*, 4–5.

⁴ See *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, 66–69.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

of the *Book of Zhuang Zi* 齐物论第二). Zhuang Zi's philosophy is framed as one that "concerns the immediate situations—of the man, the eel, the monkey, and so on—and how that situation affects the individual's agency."⁸ And this situation of an individual is the locale, so to speak, of non-activity naturalness, allowing us "to achieve the appropriate state of awareness the mind needs to be nourished" in the form of "adopting the position of doing nothing."⁹

A meditative pause is evoked by the fifth chapter – entitled "Inward Training and the Mind within the Mind" – that discusses not a single thinker but focuses on the *Neiye* (内业) or, as the selected translation of Giles, the *Inward Training*. Another strength of this book is this chapter, containing an often-overlooked text in Chinese Philosophy that scholars on the *Huangdi Neijing* (黄帝内经) or *zhong yi* (中医) as a whole might be more familiar with. In this chapter, Giles engages with the commentary of the *Neiye*, yet, consistent with the book's overarching theme, exposes its integral capacity of how the "Way fills the entire word because it is awareness."¹⁰ The Way is presented as in itself awareness, the dawning of consciousness, the moment of stillness. The chapter then continues with the cultivation of one's mind and one's very self in Daoist meditation. Giles then proceeds to tackle different forms associated with this such as yoga, breath control, and bodily alignment.¹¹

The sixth chapter looks into Lie Zi, and it frames the freedom of a traveler or of a wanderer, understanding the reality of life from a journey through nature in which one initially is conscious of the distinctions between particular objects, eventually reaching a metaphysical awareness of the eradication of this division. In Lie Zi's philosophy, we are introduced to one's freedom in natural simplicity. This is an awareness of oneself (or, perhaps better, the lack thereof) as the very basis of reality.¹² This is not simply a negation of reality but realizing life from the vantage of transient awareness of the whole, and consciousness as a totality is a sequence of these glimpses into life. Giles continues this by tackling Lie Zi's philosophy vis-à-vis fate and other forms of awareness such as in the case of dreams and even robots.¹³

The last two chapters provide us new ways awareness may be contextualized in Daoism. The seventh chapter presents Neo-Daoism's emergence in two strands, namely those affiliated with Dark or Mastery

⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ See *Ibid.*, 120–123.

¹² See *Ibid.*, 137.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 145–151.

Learning (*Xuanxue* 玄学) and Light or Pure Conversations (*Qingtan* 清谈), the former focused on “the unnamability [*sic*] of the Way, along with a focus on the notion of Way as non-being,” while the latter expressed itself “in the form of poems, literary essays, biographical accounts, and anecdotes, many of which relate to themes also found in works of the Dark Learning.”¹⁴ Giles provides us with Wang Bi and Guo Xiang as exemplars of the former, while Ruan ji and Xi Kang for the latter. Commendable is this chapter which introduces the readers to the development of Daoism, particularly ways of understanding the “Neo-Daoist ability to argue in new ways for an understanding of the Way.”¹⁵

What this book ultimately offers is not simply a situational narrative but rather it invites readers to see clarity within the Daoist tradition—how this school is not just a loose set of thinkers speaking in aphorisms and maxims but is composed of thinkers with convictions that resound the issues of their own communities. In other words, what is provided are how the various thinkers discussed tried to put forward accounts of awareness that in turn contribute “to our understanding of both what awareness is and how it relates to the world.”¹⁶ This is an awareness of our Daoist thinkers’ own historical and social embeddedness, and how their thoughts took the form of answers to the pressing questions of their time. Seeing the general picture this way allows us in turn to see how their own respective ways of philosophizing are attempts to direct their followers towards clarity of thought and of living. This is not just an invitation to learn and experience an awareness of Chinese philosophy, but, throughout the book’s chapters, a way of how one may understand and situate oneself within this very Daoist philosophy.

What is greatly commendable about the book is its ability to introduce readers to Chinese philosophy, to the thought and practice of Daoist philosophy, without bombarding them with foreign terms and concepts. Conversely, this book allows readers to explore initial themes on cross-culture or comparative philosophy, highlighting certain similarities between Chinese concepts with those of Western and even Buddhist themes. One could say that this book may serve as an introduction to Chinese (Daoist) thought, but at the same time enriching the understanding of those more attuned to the discipline. Neophytes would find this book extremely helpful in mapping the progression of Daoist thought, while those interested in comparative studies would appreciate the affinities drawn. This last point is accentuated in the book’s last two sentences: “Bringing Daoist thought into Western philosophy might well have the effect of expanding Western

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152–153.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

philosophy into playing more of an emancipatory role than it now does. This is especially so because the Way of awareness in Daoist philosophy is also a way of life.”¹⁷ The introduction of a cross-cultural perspective allows one to further expand the grammar of our own thinking and being, and through discussing Daoist philosophy, Giles invites us all to do just that.

Similar books worth pursuing on the tenor of Daoist Philosophy are Hans-Georg Moeller’s *Daoism Explained: From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* and, for those who wish to dive deeper in particular strands of Daoist thought, Christine Tan’s *Freedom’s Frailty: Self-Realization in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang’s Zhuangzi*.¹⁸

*Department of Philosophy
Research Center of Culture, Arts, and the Humanities
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

References

- Giles, James, *The Way of Awareness in Daoist Philosophy* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Publishing, 2020).
- Moeller, Hans-Georg, *Daoism Explained: From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004).
- Tan, Christine Abigail L., *Freedom’s Frailty: Self-Realization in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang’s Zhuangzi* (New York: State University of New York, 2024).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁸ Hans-Georg Moeller, *Daoism Explained: From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004) and Christine Abigail L. Tan, *Freedom’s Frailty: Self-Realization in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang’s Zhuangzi* (New York: State University of New York, 2024).

Submissions

Please Read Carefully

A. What do we publish?

We are interested in publishing articles, review articles, and book reviews 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.

We are not accepting creative works at the moment.

B. How long should a submission be?

- Article (8,000 words or less)
- Review Article (8,000 words or less)
- Book Review (2,500 words or less)

C. When should you submit and what happens to your submission??

We now accept submissions all year round. All unsolicited submissions undergo the following review process:

- Initial vetting process of the Editorial Board. In this stage, the Editorial Board screens based on their suitability for further review. All authors are informed about the result of this initial process. Please take note that a notice to proceed is not yet an offer to publish, it is merely to inform the author that his/her submission has passed the initial stage and will further undergo the blind peer-review process. It is also in this stage when the author is informed whether his/her submission is considered for the June or December issue.
- Blind peer-review process. When an author receives a notice to proceed, his/her submission will be sent to a nominated expert for blind review. In general, this process could take between two to six months, depending on various circumstances. Since this part of the review could be tedious, we solicit the patience of the author.
- Notice of acceptance, rejection, or provisional acceptance. Based on the referee's report, the author will be informed whether the Editorial Board has decided to accept or reject the submission for publication. In majority of cases, a provisional acceptance is given to an author who needs to revise his/her submission based on the recommendations of the referee and the Editorial Board. Full acceptance is only given when the recommended revisions are addressed.
- Notice to publish. A notice to publish will require the full cooperation of the author, as this stage involves editing the style, grammar, format, and overall layout of the accepted submission. Please take note that the Editorial Board reserves the right to exclude accepted submissions that do not comply with the stylistic standards of the journal.
- Release of the issue.

Because of the sheer number of unsolicited submissions that we receive on a daily basis, submission management has become a challenge for us. This often results in the piling-up of submissions, the breakdown of the online submission tool, and, at times, unacknowledged submissions. In this regard, we wish to solicit for the patience and full cooperation of contributors.

Specific Submission Guidelines

1. We accept submissions in either English or Filipino with good punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Provide a 200-word abstract in English and at least 4 key words. Please take note of the number of the acceptable word count for your submission (see Section B above).
2. Kritike is a refereed journal and follows a double-blind review policy, which means that the identities of both the author and the referee are concealed during the review process. As such, please make sure that your manuscript is prepared for blind review, meaning your name and institutional affiliation should not appear in the body of your manuscript. If you cited your own previous work(s) in the article, delete your name from the citation(s).
3. We recommend that, at the first instance, you use our prescribed citation style: Click here to visit the journal's style guide page (<https://www.kritike.org/kritike-style-guide.html>).

4. Submit your text in 2.0 line spacing with 12 points font size. Quotations exceeding four lines should be indented and single-spaced.
5. Save your paper as either a Rich Text Format file (*.rtf) or a Microsoft Word document (*.doc or *.docx).
6. Submit your paper as an email attachment to **submissions.kritike@gmail.com** with the following required information and additional attachment:
 - Complete name: Surname, first name, and middle initial
 - Institutional affiliation (e.g., Department of Philosophy, University of Santo Tomas, Philippines)
 - Official email address (preferably your institutional email address)
 - Title of your submission
 - 200-word abstract in English with at least 4 keywords
 - Attach your updated curriculum vitae
7. By sending us your submission, you agree to be bound to the Terms and Conditions stated in the journal's Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement (<https://www.kritike.org/copyright-and-ethics.html>).

NB: We will only honor unsolicited submissions with complete information and attachments. Thank you.

Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement

KRITIKE is committed to meet the highest ethical standards in research and academic publication. The journal is guided by the following principles:

A. Responsibilities of the Editorial Board

The Editorial Board ensures that manuscripts are prepared for blind peer-review. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to accept, reject, or recommend a manuscript for revision and resubmission. Such decision is based, to a large extent, on the recommendations of nominated experts who act as referees. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to inform an author about the status of his/her submission, regardless of the decision. The Editorial Board may choose to reject a paper that violates legal provisions on libel, copyrights, and originality (plagiarism). Information regarding a manuscript under review must remain confidential until it is finally accepted for publication. The Editorial Board does not necessarily endorse the views expressed in the articles published in the journal. **As an Open Access journal in the Gold category, KRITIKE does not charge any fees to complete the publication process. No charges are levied against the authors or users for submission or article processing.**

B. Responsibilities of the Referee

The referees nominated by KRITIKE's Editorial Board are experts in their areas of specialization. The referees assist the Editorial Board's decision to accept, reject, or revise and resubmit manuscripts based on their objective assessments and recommendations. A referee must treat an assigned manuscript with utmost confidentiality during the peer review process; however, it is the responsibility of the referee to inform the Editorial Board when a legal violation by the author is suspected. The evaluation of a manuscript should be based solely on its academic merit and not on race, gender, sexuality, or religious and/or political orientation of the author.

C. Responsibilities of the Author

It is the responsibility of the author to prepare his/her manuscript for blind review. The author must ensure that his/her work is original and not plagiarized. The sources used in the manuscript should be properly cited. An author must not submit the same manuscript to another journal when it is currently under review by KRITIKE. It is the responsibility of an author to inform the Editorial Board right away if his/her manuscript is being considered in another journal or publication medium; in such case, KRITIKE will discontinue the review of the manuscript. If an author's manuscript is published by KRITIKE, he/she must adhere to the provisions set in the **Copyrights** section of the journal

Contact Us

If you wish to send us your feedback, general questions about the journal, questions about article submissions, theme suggestions for future issues, or word of intention to be a peer-reviewer or referee, send a message to kritike.editor@gmail.com.

If you wish to be a peer-reviewer or referee, do send us your complete name, e-mail address, institutional affiliation, position, and area of expertise via e-mail (include subject heading: reviewer). If you have any suggestions for specific themes (e.g., “European Philosophy and the Filipino Mind” or “Is there such thing as Filipino Philosophy?”) for future issues of the journal, send them via (include subject heading: theme).

Please note that unsolicited submissions should be sent following the journal’s submission guidelines (<https://www.kritike.org/submissions.html>).

You can also contact us via snail mail:

KRITIKE
c/o **Dr. Paolo A. Bolaños**
Department of Philosophy
Room 109 Main Building
University of Santo Tomas
España, Manila 1015
Philippines