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# K R I T I K E

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## ABOUT THE COVER

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“Noise and Silence”

This photograph is an everyday scene of Riesengasse in Innsbruck, Austria. Innsbruck is a town of pastel colors, narrow streets, and centuries of history. Cradled by mountain ranges, this town was preserved throughout the years, maintaining its architectural design in as much as its lively spirit. This street is filled with shops that attract both locals and tourists by offering clothes, food, and an assortment of local craftsmanship. The noise of the economy contrasts with the silence of the Hofkirche, whose dome is visible here. A memorial of Emperor Maximilian I, the church contains a collection of Renaissance sculptures depicting pivotal moments of his life along with statues of notable individual of royal lineage. While the city teems with life outside, tradition and history stand still inside the church. As one walks through this alley, deciding where to eat and what to buy, the church stands as a silent witness to the passage of life, come and gone, amidst noise and silence.

*KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy*  
20:1 (March 2026)

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

# About the Journal

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

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

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

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

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# K R I T I K E

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Volume 20, Number 1

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## ARTICLES

- 1        KYLE ALFRED M. BARTE  
          Rethinking the Neoliberal University through Byung-Chul Han (Second of Two Parts)
- 21       EMMANUEL IFEANYI ANI  
          Where Communitarianism Stops and Liberalism Begins
- 44       GERLIE CASPE-OGATIS and NARCISA PAREDES-CANILAO  
          Expanding Social Reproduction, Criticalizing Care:  
          Two Models of Philosophical Under-labouring in the Global Crisis of Care
- 69       FRANZ GIUSEPPE F. CORTEZ  
          Border Crossing as a Form of Resistance
- 92       DAVID GOLDING  
          Mortal versus Immortal Labor: Artificial Intelligence in the Archive
- 112      JOHN RAYMUND S. ALONZO  
          On the Convergence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Investigations and Jacques Derrida's  
          Deconstruction
- 133      FRANZ JOSEPH C. YOSHIY, II  
          Historical Transformation and Prophetic Vision: Erich Fromm's Philosophy of History
- 151      VLADAN KLEMENT  
          Order as a Technology of Power: From Colonial Urbanism to Algorithmic Surveillance in  
          Smart Cities
- 175      LUKE ELLIS BLONG  
          Connecting Robber Zhi with Zhuangzian Primitivism
- 194      ANDERS KØLLE  
          Levinas's Ethics in the Age of Social Media: Faces on Facebook and the Face of the Other

- 213 IAN ANTHONY DAVATOS  
Kabataang Walang Muwang at ang Makatarungang Lipunan
- 236 MICHAEL ROLAND F. HERNANDEZ  
On Grammatology and Eurocentrism: Deconstructing the Philippine Nationalist Fantasy

## Rethinking the Neoliberal University through Byung-Chul Han (Second of Two Parts)

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**Kyle Alfred M. Barte**

**Abstract:** In this paper, I engage the neoliberalization of universities using insights from Byung-Chul Han. Specifically, I criticize the neoliberal university's absolute prioritization of what Han calls the *vita activa* (active life) over the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life). I argue that the emphasis the neoliberal university places on activity or work is crippling its own capacity to think. I begin by expositing Han's insight that thinking and knowledge flourishes during moments of inactivity or leisure, i.e., the *vita contemplativa*. Next, I present a brief sketch of the neoliberal university and, using Han's language, emphasize how work and performance have become its central categories, eventually diminishing the role of inactivity or leisure within its walls. Afterwards, I show that the absolutization of the *vita activa* has crippled thinking within the confines of the university. This atrophy of thought is manifested in various areas, such as the informatization of teaching, the inability to criticize the status quo, the production of superficial and inferior research publications, and the fading of the spirit of community. Finally, this paper ends with an appraisal of the *vita contemplativa* as a counterbalance to the neoliberal strictures on thinking within the university.

**Keywords:** Han, achievement society, neoliberal university, *vita contemplativa*

### The Crippling of Thought in Neoliberal Universities

A decade before the neoliberal onslaught, most American students in the 1960s, when asked what their primary motivation was in attending college, indicated the goal of developing a meaningful

## 2 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

philosophy, while being well-off financially was just a distant second.<sup>1</sup> Students then still saw education as more of a transformative process and less of a mere stepping-stone for financial success. Five decades later, however, these motivational factors have virtually traded places.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, most students today indicate that becoming well-off financially is their primary reason why they attend college.<sup>3</sup> Most students nowadays view education purely from a standpoint of instrumentality. For some commentators, this is unavoidable in a society where tuition fees are extremely expensive<sup>4</sup> and where an individual's capacity to attain financial stability rests on their possession of certain merits (the university degree being one of the most important documents of merit today).<sup>5</sup> Given this, to increase their profits by maintaining or increasing their student enrollees, neoliberal universities prioritize academic programs that promise quick financial returns and stability to those who take them. Most of the time, these are the programs most relevant to industry, such as the medical sciences, engineering, tech, and so on. Conversely, the liberal arts and the humanities have been gradually disappearing from the university curriculum, leading Frank Donoghue to utter in despair that all hope is lost for the humanities and its professors, that eventually they will disappear altogether from the landscape of higher education.<sup>6</sup> The Philippine government's recent attempt to remove humanities courses from the college curriculum, such as Ethics and Art Appreciation, is only the latest local iteration of this alarming global trend. Once viewed through the neoliberal imperative of work and performance, it is easy to see why this is so: the liberal arts and the humanities simply do not offer the skills and knowledge that are immediately translatable into the skills demanded by the industry or the skills suited for profit-making.

Herein we encounter one of the ways the neoliberal regime leaves thinking within the university anemic. More so than others, the liberal arts

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Saunders, "The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students," in *Journal of College and Character*, 8:5 (2007), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Saunders, "The Impact of Neoliberalism on College Students," 6.

<sup>3</sup> A good example here are pre-university students in the Philippines after undergoing the highly contentious K-12 program. Graduates of the technically-based K-12 program "expect larger monetary returns in exchange for shorter education or much higher return for lengthier time spend in college." Gerardo M. Lanuza, "Neo-fascism as the Apparatus of Neoliberalism's Assault on Philippine Higher Education: Towards an Anti-Fascist Pedagogy," in *Kritike*, 16:1 (June 2022), 150.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 88. See also, Lawrence Busch, *Knowledge for Sale: The Neoliberal Takeover of Higher Education* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017), 53.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Michael J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* (UK: Penguin Books, 2021), EPUB, introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Donoghue, *The Last Professors*, xi.

and the humanities are courses that offer spaces for critique and reflection. Usually, they invite students to correspond with the ideas of their peers and of thinkers past and present. It is true that they do not offer skills and knowledge that are immediately translatable into profit-making, making them impractical and purposeless from the standpoint of capital accumulation. But this is where their significance lies. If we recall from this paper's part I, for Han, thinking emerges during moments of inactivity, of time free from the demands of work and survival.<sup>7</sup> This is precisely what the humanities and liberal arts courses offer. Their purported impracticality and purposelessness turn them into moments of pause and interruption from the preoccupation for survival and work. In this way, the humanities and liberal arts classrooms become fecund sites for contemplative lingering and reflection, not mere sites for calculating and information gathering. The spaces for thinking to flourish within the university are severely reduced without them. But this is only the beginning. As I will show throughout this paper, once we look closely at the various areas of the neoliberal university, what is revealed is the sad reality that the university today—popularly considered as think tanks, where deep study and reflection are made and encouraged—have become spaces that suffocate thinking.

This atrophy of thought greets us immediately once we look closely at the pedagogical approach the neoliberal university attempts to cultivate. It is a well-known fact that in its quest for transparency and achievement, the neoliberal university has developed the tendency of flattening the “learnedness” of the students into test scores and grades. To my mind, this leads to two problematic outcomes. Firstly, it aggravates the instrumental view of education by conditioning the students to think of classes as only a means to their grades. I suspect that this is a major reason why many universities today actively encourage or require grading students' participation as a way to motivate class engagement,<sup>8</sup> which only implies that students will not be engaged and interested without the reward or threat of a grade. Instead of pursuing their curiosities and exploring an especially difficult theory, we instead hear students grumble and complain: “What does this have to do with my grades?” To this end, classes as moments of contemplative inactivity rarely emerge.

And secondly, this imperative to flatten students into grades underpins the popularity of the “teaching to the test” pedagogy which has transformed education to the force-feeding of correct opinions: “the correct

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<sup>7</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingerings*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2017), EPUB, chap. 12.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Cheryl Holly, Sallie Porter, Tracy R. Vitale, and Mercedes Echevarria, “Grading Participation in the Classroom: The Assumptions, Challenges, and Alternatives,” in *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 19:1 (2024).

## 4 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

opinions about literature, or history, or science, or mathematics. Hence the universality of the bullet point, delivered in a college lecture, whose temporary memorization is the condition for the above-average grade," Zena Hitz laments.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a student's memory of a piece of information is easier to quantify and rank than, say, the maturation of their thought or the development of their critical consciousness. But this type of pedagogy, once viewed through Han's lenses, invites little to no thinking. Teaching to the test forces the mind into set and narrow paths that lead toward a set of predetermined correct opinions. What is lost in this pedagogical approach is thinking as open-ended inquiry. As Han himself said in *The Transparency Society*, "[t]hinking does not follow precalculated paths, but betakes itself into the open."<sup>10</sup> As a form of correspondence, it goes to where being or the other leads it. This is why the paths thinking takes cannot be determined beforehand. This accords with his argument in *The Scent of Time* that "[t]hinking is free because its place and time cannot be calculated. It often progresses discontinuously."<sup>11</sup> My argument is that in the neoliberal university the freedom and uncertainty that define the thinking process are tightly controlled so that thought will necessarily arrive at a set of correct pieces of information. Here, instead of progressing discontinuously, the mind is forced to become linear. Instead of being open to the disturbances of the Other, it is forced to retreat to the already familiar. It must ignore the voice of being/Other for it must go towards a pre-determined conclusion. Because of this, thinking, which for Han is supposed to be friendly to the voice of being/Other, cannot emerge. It has become deaf.

Conversely, a thinking classroom may look something like Zena Hitz's description of the classes she had while an undergraduate student:

Our classes proceeded without agendas, the discussion driven by the living questions that we and our teachers brought to the room. Accordingly, our conversations could flounder in indifference or lack of preparation; they could chug along steadily, building quiet momentum; or they could explode with the excitement of a newly discovered insight. I was enchanted by the honesty of the project: as the books were, as the questions were, as the human beings who participated were, so the discussion went. There was no artificial

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<sup>9</sup> Zena Hitz, *Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of an Intellectual Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 192.

<sup>10</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 30.

<sup>11</sup> Han, *Scent of Time*, EPUB, chap. 12.

clarity or forced organization to soften the discomfort of the work of the mind, no cushion between us and the difficulties or dangers of inquiry or the thrill of discovery.<sup>12</sup>

We see here a concrete example of what Hanian thinking could look like inside the classroom. Hitz's description exemplifies Han's important claim that thinking is a form of correspondence. Their classroom discussion shows that their thinking process was not forced and constricted by fixed paths; rather, it was borne along the natural and unpredictable flow of thinking. In a sense, their discussions went to where inquiry led it.

But this thinking classroom, Hitz herself admitted, was inefficient. It was not rare for their discussions described in the above quotation to flounder. This is no longer surprising for us. As I have discussed in part I, thinking for Han is naturally inefficient for it often involves making-pauses and delays.<sup>13</sup> This is perhaps one of the reasons why neoliberal universities, in the effort to improve efficiency, prefer pedagogy that centers on information gathering. We know from Han that aside from its quantifiability, the gathering of information can be accelerated since pieces of information can simply be added on top of one another. Its additive nature implies that little time is needed to jump from one piece of information to the next. I believe that this is especially the case in some neoliberal universities that offer shorter course offerings.<sup>14</sup> Under such conditions, classes need to rush through the course content, leaving little time for contemplating and questioning. Truly, there are many instances during accelerated courses wherein student questions were disregarded because their teachers had so much to cover during their limited class time or are immediately off to their other classes.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the classroom no longer becomes a site for correspondence and listening. The obsession for efficiency, coupled with the lack of time to deliver a course, transforms the class into a process whereby

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<sup>12</sup> Hitz, *Lost in Thought*, 4–5.

<sup>13</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Many neoliberal universities today offer an array of study options to suit the varied demands of student-consumers. On the menu are fast-track or accelerated degrees, one- to two-year degree options, and trimester systems, among other things. The primary motivation here is money. This strategy enables universities to attract a huge population of students. See, for instance, Igea Troiani and Claudia Dutson, "The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education," in *Architecture and Culture*, 9:1 (2021), 12–13. See also Anibeth Desierto and Carmela de Maio, "The Impact of Neoliberalism on Academics and Students in Higher Education: A Call to Adopt Alternative Philosophies," in *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 14:2 (2020), 153.

<sup>15</sup> Clarissa Davis-Ragland, "Accelerated Courses and Barriers to Persistence for Traditional-Age College Students" (Doctoral Dissertation: Walden University, USA, 2022), 103.

## 6 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

the teacher passes pieces of information to seemingly mute students, similar to the banking method much criticized by Paulo Freire. We encounter here a twisted scene of thinking as listening. Contrary to its appearance, these students are not listening to the voice of the Other. They have no access to the Other for they have no time to deviate from their pre-curated learning plan. What they are receiving are pieces of information already familiar, of the non-Other. The Other here does not speak. Its voice is drowned by the uninterrupted flow of information from the mouth of the teacher, from the voice of the Same.

I am further convinced that this similar obsession with efficiency is a huge reason why there is a growing trend in neoliberal universities of breaking down complex narratives into manageable doses.<sup>16</sup> Textbooks, for example, have become shorter and demand less from the students.<sup>17</sup> Further, instead of intellectually challenging the students, university courses have been modified to become more “student friendly.”<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that this “friendliness” of the courses does not resemble Han’s understanding of the term at all. To recall the discussion in part I, friendliness for Han is an act of emptiness whereby the ego divests itself of itself to let the Other speak. This entails certain attitudes, such as slowness and patience, to allow the Other to unfold in its own pace. The “friendliness” of the university courses described above is therefore a grotesque rendering of this notion. For, instead of expressing the slowness and patience that are constitutive of emptiness, the “friendly” course fragments itself into manageable doses all in the name of efficiency and speed. Instead of giving way for the appearance of thinkers in the Hanian sense—thinkers that display the virtues of listening, slowness, and patience, among others—what emerges on the scene are the type of students Sinéad Murphy regularly taught while teaching in a neoliberal university in the UK: “[t]hey are like thinkers on speed: thinking so fast that nothing has time to coalesce into anything like a thought; thinking so furiously that they have flown clean off the handle.”<sup>19</sup>

This is why many have argued that the neoliberal university molds students to become mere robots and useful machines.<sup>20</sup> According to Martha Nussbaum, this is by design. Neoliberal elites, she says, think that “[t]he students’ freedom of mind is dangerous if what is wanted is a group of

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 152.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See Alpesh Maisuria and Svenja Helmes, *Life for the Academic in the Neoliberal University* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 20.

<sup>19</sup> Sinéad Murphy, *Zombie University: Thinking Under Control* (London: Repeater Books, 2017), EPUB, chap. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 31.

technically trained obedient workers to carry out the plans of elites who are aiming at foreign investment and technological development. Critical thinking will, then, be discouraged.”<sup>21</sup> Nussbaum captures in this passage the smoothening effect that Han points out as one of the major goals of neoliberalism. For the latter, neoliberalism smooths things out so that capital can flow freely and quickly.<sup>22</sup> The faster capital flows, the more it expands and accumulates. To my mind, the neoliberal university designs its curriculum and courses in such a way that discourages thinking because individuals who can think potentially become speed bumps that delay the movement of capital. Thus, I argue that instead of thinking subjects, the neoliberal university molds students to resemble what Han refers to as “processors.” In *The Disappearance of Rituals*, he described processors as “faster than a human being precisely because they neither think nor understand; they only calculate.”<sup>23</sup> He dives deeper into this topic in *The Burnout Society* wherein he paints this processor-like thinking as characterized by hyperattention or, in his own words, “[a] rash change of focus between different tasks, sources of information, and processes.”<sup>24</sup> This inevitably disallows the processor from thinking of something different altogether since hyperattention has a low tolerance for pauses and boredom, that “profound idleness that benefits the creative process.”<sup>25</sup> This, again, is why he thinks that a computer is stupid because it cannot pause. Pausing, for Han, opens up spaces for the thinking of alternatives, for the emergence of the Other. Without pauses, thinking simply “reproduces and accelerates what is already available.”<sup>26</sup> For me, students in the neoliberal university are trained exactly to become processor-like. Like processors they are trained to calculate as efficiently as possible, that is, to gather pieces of information and activate them during critical moments, say, during exams. And just like processors, they are enjoined to move as quickly as possible, to cover as much ground as possible in the time allotted, leaving little time for pauses and boredom. Han allows us to make sense of why this is so. Truly, with minimal pauses and delays, students also rarely enter that profound idleness which, for Han, is the space where alternatives emerge.<sup>27</sup> This, in my eyes, is one of

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<sup>21</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Han, *Transparency Society*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2020), 82.

<sup>24</sup> Han, *Burnout Society*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> On a sidenote, Han has a sinister warning when it comes to the reduction of humans into processors: they only know acceleration and have no access to inactivity or rest. This, inevitably, leads to burnout and depression. This, again, recalls Han’s gloomy depiction of 21<sup>st</sup>

## 8 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

the effective mechanisms neoliberalism employs to secure the students' obedience: leaving them without downtime to contemplate other possibilities outside of the neoliberal purview.

One may object that the issues mentioned above can be easily rectified by the teacher if they adopt certain pedagogical techniques and approaches that cultivate thinking. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, proposes the Socratic dialogue precisely for this purpose. But what is also true is that the neoliberal university has made it ever more difficult for the teacher to implement these approaches. For instance, in the effort to cut costs, classes in neoliberal universities have ballooned in size. In the Philippines, for example, it is not uncommon for an instructor, especially in state universities and colleges, to have 50 students or more in one class. Imagine then the difficulty of effectively implementing Socratic dialogue in a class of more than 30 students. This difficulty compounds in fast-tracked or shorter courses where the speed required to cover an entire semester's content in a span of, say, three months or less may inhibit the teacher from inviting open-ended inquiry which may take them into paths far from their course content. This is even impossible to conduct in neoliberal universities that offer massive open online courses (MOOC) where there is no live interaction between teacher and student.<sup>28</sup> Thus, despite the promise held by pedagogical approaches like Socratic dialogue, implementing them becomes a daunting task within the neoliberal university where conditions appear to be hostile to thinking.

The conditions are not much different outside the classroom. The heavy workload demand of neoliberal universities condition the students' body and mind to focus primarily on quantitative and qualitative task delivery even after their classes.<sup>29</sup> On top of this, the rising costs of education in neoliberal universities force many students to work part-time jobs to pay

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century society in *The Burnout Society*: excessive tiredness and exhaustion, due to lack of breaks and intervals from work, generates burnt-out individuals that could no longer perform properly, individuals that are "are no longer able to be able." It is here where, according to Han, depression erupts: "It erupts at the moment when the achievement subject is *no longer able to be able*." No wonder then that the burnout and depression rates among university students in past decades have skyrocketed. Han, *Burnout Society*, 10. See also Han, *Scent of Time*, EPUB, 83.

<sup>28</sup> I acknowledge the practicality of online courses. However, if we look at them from Han's angle, they do little in the cultivation of thinking. Firstly, they isolate people. This is especially the case with asynchronous class setups advertised to have the student learn at their own pace. But what is lost here is the correspondence that is so important to thinking. And secondly, in my eyes, an instrumental view pervades online learning. Most people take them not to contemplate but to procure certificates needed for promotion or work. At the end of the day, it has been totalized into the neoliberal regime.

<sup>29</sup> Troiani and Dutson, "The Neoliberal University as a Space to Learn/Think/Work in Higher Education," 14.

off their student loans.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, at the college level, “students are dazzled with a blitz of spaces that now look like malls, while in between classes they are endlessly entertained by a mammoth sports culture.”<sup>31</sup> Truly, in the neoliberal university, students are constantly engaged and stimulated. Henry Giroux has often bewailed that pedagogy in the neoliberal university does not enable the students to connect their private troubles with public issues.<sup>32</sup> I do not disagree with Giroux’s observation. But what he failed to point out is that aside from the failure of pedagogy, students simply have less downtime and inactivity to build this connection themselves. I surmise that due to the absence of inactive moments, it is difficult for the students’ thought to enter the contemplative mode. As Han would have us believe, if one only had the power to do something and think something, it would be impossible to think back and reflect.<sup>33</sup> In much the same way, if the students always have something that seizes their attention, be it course requirements or university entertainment, they have less downtime where the pieces of information drilled into them can percolate and weave themselves into a narrative, where they can relate what they have learned to their private troubles and broader social issues.

Academics are not immune from these effects. Their mountainous workload, coupled with the pressure of losing their positions if they fail to meet performance indicators, has led to high levels of exhaustion and burnout throughout the academic ranks. This is the kind of exhaustion that debilitates thinking, similar to what the distinguished psychoanalyst and self-proclaimed former “achievement subject” Josh Cohen experienced when he was just starting his career in the academe. Reflecting on his early academic career through Han’s conception of a burnout society, Cohen shared:

In the scarce hours outside of those duties [teaching, marking, and committee meetings], I’d return to work on an article and quickly realise that I needed to comb a dozen more sources before I could begin to write it. Abruptly, I became aware of how tired I was; able neither to work nor refrain from it, I’d lie suspended in a state of weary wakefulness. That hollowed-out

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<sup>30</sup> Busch, *Knowledge for Sale*, 52. See also Desierto and de Maio, “Impact of Neoliberalism on Academics and Students in Higher Education,” 152.

<sup>31</sup> Giroux, *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>33</sup> Han, *Burnout Society*, 24.

## 10 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

achievement self, 'at war with itself', was all too familiar.<sup>34</sup>

Cohen's anecdote demonstrates a major implication of the absolutization of the *vita activa* in neoliberal universities: the academic achievement subject becomes too tired to think. More seriously, this pressure to excel and produce has actually destroyed the health of many academics, even ending in the suicides of some.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Han's depiction of depression as auto-aggression seems to be true here.

Aside from excessive tiredness and exhaustion, the neoliberal university constricts the academics' freedom of thought by restricting the mind from taking certain paths, particularly lines of thought that contradict the edicts of neoliberalism. Cases of suspension and firing of professors and instructors for giving off "negative vibes," for actively participating in unions, and for voicing their criticisms against capitalism and the neoliberal policies of their respective universities have become quite frequent across many neoliberal universities.<sup>36</sup> Hence, it might not be an exaggeration to posit that academics in neoliberal universities do not have real freedom of thought. The cases above show that if academics want to keep their jobs, they have to constrain their own thinking and accept that there are certain paths or topics that they simply could not broach. Here, Han's depiction of thinking as correspondence with the Other is clearly crippled. Indeed, for Han, neoliberalism persistently bars the mind from accessing the Other, that is, the non-neoliberal. This is why, across a number of books, he depicts the neoliberal regime as the hell of the Same.<sup>37</sup> This expulsion of the Other plays well in the hands of neoliberal capitalism. As Han wrote in *The Expulsion of the Other*, "[i]t is precisely where the Same encounters the Same that this circulation [of information, communication, and capital] reaches its highest velocity."<sup>38</sup> For me, this explains why many neoliberal universities cannot tolerate divergent thinking academics. Their operations accelerate if everybody buys into the neoliberal model.

Academic thinking is further ruined by the fact that tenureship and promotion in the neoliberal university is largely determined by research

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<sup>34</sup> Josh Cohen, "The Winter of Civilisation: Byung-Chul Han's Relentless Critiques of Digital Capitalism Reveal How This Suffocating System Creates Hollowed-out Lives," in *Aeon* (28 February 2025), <<https://aeon.co/essays/thought-tinkering-the-korean-german-philosopher-byung-chul-han>>.

<sup>35</sup> Maisuria and Helmes, *Life for the Academic*, 27–29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Han, *Disappearance of Rituals*, 44. See also, Byung-Chul Han, *The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2018), chap. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Han, *Expulsion of the Other*, chap. 2.

productivity. Whipped by this publish or perish culture, exhausted and time-pressed academics are forced to produce hastily written papers to, at the very least, survive in the academe. Surely, in this setting, thinking, which for Han requires a time for maturation, cannot truly flourish. This is evidenced by a noticeable drop in the quality of research publications today. As Jerry Muller speculated, “[r]eally important books may take many years to research and write. But if the incentive system rewards speed and volume of output, the result is likely to be a decline in truly significant works.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, since quantity is incentivized over quality, it is all too common among researchers to publish a slightly different version of the same research paper or split potentially strong papers into multiple different publications where the strength of the argument is spread thin. This has also given birth to a grotesque practice: publishing in predatory journals. Without rigorous scientific scrutiny, the published papers in such journals are usually hastily written and of poor quality, articles which, as one editorial puts it, “threaten to pollute the pool of scientific evidence with poorly conducted research and pseudoscience.”<sup>40</sup> All in all, the outcome of this culture, as Muller observed in Great Britain, is the production of “a great stream of publications that are both uninteresting and unread.”<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the production of bad quality papers due to haste and acceleration is, I believe, only the surface of the issue. I think that a more fundamental issue here, which Han’s insights helped me to pinpoint, is the transmutation of thinking into work. If we can recall from the discussions in part I, work for Han is the domain of processuality and practicality, as something individuals must do to fill a lack, reach a goal, or to survive. In contradistinction to this, thinking as *vita contemplativa* is the domain of the useless and the purposeless, of the end-in-itself. Given this distinction, I contend that by tying research productivity to tenureship and promotion, the neoliberal university transforms thinking into a means to an end. Academics must “think” in order to produce a publishable paper, in order to hold onto their jobs, and in order to advance in their careers. Thinking, in this manner, becomes a type of work. But, as Han reminds us, “[w]ork ... takes away freedom, because it is subject to the coercive force exerted by the necessities of life.”<sup>42</sup> It is this loss of freedom that, in my analysis, greatly impairs academic thinking. By making research production so important that it makes or breaks an academic’s career, the mind also loses real freedom to think.

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<sup>39</sup> Jerry Z. Muller, *The Tyranny of Metrics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 79.

<sup>40</sup> Hester Gail Y. Lim, “Predation in Publishing,” Editorial in *Journal of the Philippine Dermatological Society*, 33:1 (May 2024).

<sup>41</sup> Muller, *Tyranny of Metrics*, 79.

<sup>42</sup> Han, *Scent of Time*, EPUB, chap. 12.

## 12 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

Consumed by the need to churn out research papers for survival, many academics are forced to work on narrow research topics and are discouraged from exploring new domains or projects where a publication is not a guaranteed outcome. This was exactly what happened to Zena Hitz whose capability to think was greatly crippled by too much pressure to publish:

I had lost much of the ability to think freely and openly on a topic, concerned lest I lose my hard-won position in the academic social hierarchy. I worked busily on narrow research projects and did not allow myself the time to read and reflect broadly.<sup>43</sup>

Hitz's experience, much like what Han is insisting, shows what happens when thinking becomes a type of work. When it is tied to survival in the academe, I argue, thinking becomes narrow and superficial. As Han quips, "[t]he *mind* that works would be a contradiction."<sup>44</sup> This is why, for him, the life of a thinker is anything but work. It is only when the mind is free from the clutches of the *vita activa* that it can contemplate deeply and broadly.

Finally, the atrophy of thinking in neoliberal universities is aggravated by the slow decline of the spirit of community within their walls. "*Community is listenership*," Han says in the final chapter of *The Expulsion of the Other*.<sup>45</sup> In his view, the capacity to listen is the precondition for the binding of individuals into a community. Hence, we can rightly say that, for Han, the demise of the community signals the atrophy of thinking given that thinking, as mentioned throughout this paper, is listening to the Other. With this in mind, I argue that the neoliberal university impairs thinking by dismantling most traces of the community within the university. I contend that instead of cultivating its subjects' capacity to listen, the neoliberal university enjoins them to become narcissistic egos thinking primarily of their next achievement, prestige, their grades and evaluation results, economic incentives and awards, and so on. The Other, in this context, is no longer perceived as someone who speaks. Rather, it is recast into a mere competitor of the ego. However, as Han warns us, thinking as listening is only possible when individuals empty themselves so that the Other has space to be, something which the narcissistic ego, who is incessantly hyperactive in the pursuit of endless achievements and optimal performance, is incapable of doing.<sup>46</sup> We can see how this negatively impacts thinking within the neoliberal university in very literal scenarios. For example, we can surmise

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<sup>43</sup> Hitz, *Lost in Thought*, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Han, *Scent of Time*, EPUB, chap. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Han, *Expulsion of the Other*, chap. 12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

that when students become hypercompetitive, less collaboration between them also arises. This could hinder them from learning from one another or from helping each other grasp a challenging topic or lesson. This is even more prominent in the academic field where the increased competition between individual researchers, scientific fields, and departments has encouraged the splintering of academia into various self-enclosed silos that rarely collaborate or talk to each other.<sup>47</sup> Because more resources are allocated to individuals and departments that perform or publish well, researchers and disciplines see themselves as competitors in the ruthless game of metrics. This, undoubtedly, is a hindrance to thinking in general. For instance, the lack of interdisciplinary discourse and collaboration is a real hindrance to the expansion and development of knowledge as a whole. No doubt, specialization is important for the deepening of knowledge. However, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of reality, say, the human condition, necessitates a multi-disciplinary approach, one where the sciences, liberal arts, and the humanities work hand-in-hand. In my view, this, along with all the points mentioned above, gives me the confidence to posit that thinking has indeed been ruined within universities that have shamelessly kowtowed to the neoliberal machine.

### **Conclusion: The Inactive University as a Thinking University**

Given the battered state of thinking in the neoliberal university, this paper now seeks to tackle an important question: What is to be done? If we ask Han, his answer may not be as optimistic as we hope. According to Robert Wyllie, Han seems to have a pessimistic view of the university owing to the fact that Han, across all of his works, never turned to education as a fecund site for critical alternatives to neoliberalism.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Wyllie seems to indicate that for Han university education simply is a tool for the neoliberal regime to populate the entire globe with achievement subjects.<sup>49</sup> In fact, Han's relative reticence when it comes to the critical potential of education signifies a broader issue with his philosophical outlook in general: he has oftentimes been criticized for failing to produce viable ways out of the neoliberalism he so strongly condemns.<sup>50</sup> This is the point in the paper where I will attempt to deviate a little bit from Han's reticence and lack of alternatives.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Naomi Ellemers, "Science as Collaborative Knowledge Generation," in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 60:1 (2021), 1–28.

<sup>48</sup> See Steven Knepper, Ethan Stoneman, and Robert Wyllie, *Byung-Chul Han: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2024), 27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>50</sup> Jason Morgan, "Ritual and Otherness in Human Relations: The Human-Person Philosophy of Byung-Chul Han," in *Studia Gilsoniana*, 12:2 (April–June 2023), 317.

## 14 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

To my mind, the point is not to abandon the university, much like what Han's reticence seems to indicate. Rather, I argue that Han's insights, particularly on thinking and its inextricable relationship with inactivity, can be used as guiding principles in rethinking the university so that it becomes a fecund site for the emergence of the Other and alternatives to neoliberalism. To this end, I argue that instead of an active university, it should be reformed to become what I call an "inactive university."

To be clear, what I envisage is not the total expulsion of work or activity from the realms of the university. The university of today certainly cannot revert to the ancient Greek ideal of education as *scholē*, which literally means leisure. What I argue is that in order for the university to reinvigorate its capacity to think, it must not give absolute priority to the *vita activa* to the detriment of the *vita contemplativa*. Borrowing Han's suggestion for society in general, I contend that the university must place these two poles in an equal footing. Work is essential for the survival of the university. But pockets of inactivity—of the useless and the purposeless, of play free from compulsion—within its day-to-day and annual operations are also equally essential. This is not something new. In fact, the balance between the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* have long constituted the spirit of the university. This, according to Stefan Collini, is one of the university's great strengths, that is, that it has always been practical (e.g., providing the church with its personnel or state bureaucracies with its staff) while simultaneously providing "a supportive setting for the human mind's restless pursuit of fuller understanding."<sup>51</sup> Below, I offer simple suggestions as to how the contemporary university can attain this balance by pointing out some key areas where it can invite inactivity. However, it is important to keep in mind that the suggestions I will outline below do not and should not exhaust the possibilities of what an inactive, that is, a thinking university might be like.

Contemporary experiments with inactivity in an educational setting have proven to be effective in allowing thinking to flourish. We can see this in educational settings where gradeless learning is applied. The grading system, which I showed earlier as a concrete manifestation of the neoliberal imperative of transparency and achievement, has, time and again, been shown to increase the psychic maladies of students, reduce their intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning, and discourage critical and creative thinking.<sup>52</sup> In opposition to this, gradeless learning, or the practice of substituting traditional numerical or letter-based grades with qualitative

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<sup>51</sup> Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), EPUB, chap. 1.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, Heather J. Leslie, "Research on Effects of Grading," in *Learning Design Center: Staff Scholarship* (2021), <<https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=ldc-scholarship>>.

feedbacks and pass-fail assessments, has shown to not only increase the well-being of the students, but that it also induces a deeper understanding of lessons and topics, increases motivation for learning, and encourages students to take more difficult and intellectually challenging subjects.<sup>53</sup> Gradeless learning, I contend, converts the classroom into a haven of inactivity, one where students are not overburdened by the necessity to fill a lack or reach a numerical goal, one where they can freely contemplate and reflect without the asphyxiating pressure from a grading system that counts and measures their every movement. Indeed, this has the potential of shifting our view of classroom learning from a means to an end into an end in itself.

A similar result on academics may be reached by removing research incentives and reducing the impact of article publications in their careers. This endeavor decouples research and work, making the former a distinct form of non-work, or inactivity in the Hanian terminology. In other words, it could help transform research into something done for its own sake and not for the sake of survival in the academe. Interestingly, the burgeoning field of neuroscience helps us articulate just how this contributes in the flourishing of thinking. A quick glance at the literature reveals what we intuitively know all along: that constant stress and pressure impair cognitive function, memory retrieval, and creativity.<sup>54</sup> In the context of academic writing, this is especially relevant given the fact that writing something which meaningfully contributes to the development of human knowledge and civilization requires, among other things, creativity, a strong memory, and a vigorous cognitive faculty. In the blunt words of Stefan Collini: academics are more likely to do fruitful work if you do not say to them “Be creative or I’ll beat the hell out of you.”<sup>55</sup> Sadly, this constant threat of being beaten up, of being sacked, is what academics in neoliberal universities today face day in and day out, as if the mind could function more efficiently under constant stress and pressure. Such approach is not only misguided but clearly antithetical to the endeavor of thinking. On this account, it is best to leave academics to the free play of their minds if they are to produce meaningful and quality publications. This is why it is better for academic life in the field of research

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<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Annemette Kjærgaard, Julie Buhl-Wiggers, and Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen, “Does Gradeless Learning Affect Students’ Academic Performance? A Study of Effects over Time,” in *Studies in Higher Education*, 49:2 (2024). See also Jeff Cain, Melissa Medina, Frank Romanelli, and Adam Persky, “Deficiencies of Traditional Grading Systems and Recommendations for the Future,” in *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 86: 7 (2022).

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Susanne Vogel and Lars Schwabe, “Learning and Memory under Stress: Implications for the Classroom,” in *npj Science of Learning*, 1:16011 (2016). See also Oshin Vartanian, Sidney Ann Saint, Nicole Herz, and Peter Suedfeld, “The Creative Brain Under Stress: Considerations for Performance in Extreme Environments,” in *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11:585969 (2020).

<sup>55</sup> Collini, *What Are Universities For?*, EPUB, chap. 6.

## 16 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

to resemble Han's depiction of Aristotle: "Aristotle was born, did *not* work, and died."<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, a university that decides to embrace inactivity may look at reforming its understanding of sabbatical leaves. At present, most neoliberal universities grant sabbatical leaves to tenured faculty members with the expectation that those who go on leave, say, for one academic year, would have an output (e.g., a book) to show after the aforementioned period. This again typifies the absolutization of the *vita activa* within the neoliberal university. In this way, the sabbatical leave does not become a genuine interruption from work; only the capacity to work anywhere and anytime. I contend that it would be better for the flourishing of thought to make a sabbatical leave a genuine site of inactivity. Here, there are no projects to complete. It is a total break from work, a time for reflection and intellectual exploration.

Finally, the restoration of inactivity in the university may also lead to the cultivation of thinking in a more indirect manner: the formation of the university as a community. The previous section pointed out that, for Han, a community presupposes listenership, which is constitutive of thinking. With this in mind, I contend that the formation of the university into an inactive university converts its subjects, especially academics and students, into Han's listening, and thus thinking, subjects. We can see this in a couple of ways. For instance, gradeless learning has been shown to de-escalate competition among students and improve their collaboration.<sup>57</sup> It conditions them to think that they are not each other's enemies but are in the process of learning together. The same effect may also take hold among academics without league rankings and publication incentives. Perhaps the elimination of these neoliberal apparatuses may encourage individual and inter-disciplinary collaboration all in the hopes of expanding and developing knowledge for its own sake.

The suggestions I outlined above might elicit some panic. Neoliberal ideologues might say: "But if academics are not compelled to be active, to produce a constant stream of research, to be constantly audited and managed, they will become useless and mediocre." But this is not necessarily true. Let us keep in mind that the compulsion to publish is a recent phenomenon. Frank Donoghue traces it to the 1970s, coinciding with the birth and gradual takeover of neoliberalism over the whole of society.<sup>58</sup> But let us take note of the multitude of books, essays, monographs, articles, etc., that have significantly shaped human civilization produced before the neoliberal

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<sup>56</sup> Han, *Scent of Time*, EPUB, chap. 12.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Kjærgaard, Buhl-Wiggers, and Mikkelsen, "Does Gradeless Learning Affect Students' Academic Performance?," 338.

<sup>58</sup> Donoghue, *The Last Professors*, 51–52.

period, that is, before research publication has become frantic and compulsory: the brilliance of an academic's work is not contingent on the "publish or perish" culture that seemingly engulfs today's neoliberal university. To be sure, not all will reach the heights of brilliance if we simply eliminate the pressure to produce. However, what is also true is that neoliberalism's attempt to ensure academic productivity does not guarantee the production of works that would serve any meaningful purpose to the intellectual life or to society at large. Rather, as I have shown in this paper, when academics are whipped to be active all the time, the quality of their work is actually significantly compromised.

The same ideologues might also say: "But if students are not constantly evaluated and pressured to be active, we cannot ensure the production of quality graduates." But what type of graduates do we actually want to produce out of our universities? If we want to produce highly skilled workers who find it difficult to think for themselves, then the neoliberal setup is the way to go. But university education could do so much more. Aside from molding students to become mere cogs in the neoliberal machine, education, among other things, can also cultivate conscientious democratic citizens with a heightened sensitivity to issues of social justice. And this, I contend, requires the embrace of the *vita contemplativa*. Inactive moments allow the mind to think back and reflect, to connect the dots. It opens up a free space for the students to connect their private troubles with public issues. Thus, the fear that inactivity in the university would lead to inferior graduates is a fear that stems primarily from a particular group: those who have nothing to gain should the neoliberal status quo be upended.

By paying close attention to Han's insights on thinking, we can rethink the neoliberal university in a number of ways. He allows us to expose some of the pathologies that have proliferated within the walls of the neoliberal university, particularly those that relate to the university's incapacity to think. He also allows us to rethink the organization of the university so that thinking could flourish within its walls. Most importantly, Han's insights lead us to the important realization that we need to rethink the university's relationship with neoliberalism. As the neoliberal regime continues to flatten the globe to ensure the quick and efficient circulation of capital, we need, more than ever, spaces of resistance where alternatives could emerge. The university, as a place populated by people who devote themselves to thinking, holds the potential of becoming such a place. But for the university to become a bulwark against the neoliberalization of the planet, it must somehow keep neoliberalism at arm's length. The university must become a site of negativity, a form of interruption from the mad and furious dance of capital. Many of the university's primary stakeholders, especially the thinkers that populate its hallowed halls, already know this. Many, after

## 18 RETHINKING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

all, have already bewailed and deplored, in writing and word of mouth, neoliberalism's bastardization of the university. I guess, then, the proper formulation of the problem at hand is this: What are we prepared to do about it?

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## Where Communitarianism Stops and Liberalism Begins

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*Emmanuel Ifeanyi Ani*

**Abstract:** Bernard Matolino argues that Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is not different from the radical communitarianism of earlier communitarians. But I show that in many other places, Matolino acknowledges that Gyekye's version is indeed different. I also show that Matolino has the penchant to not only praise Gyekye for positions he (Matolino) has previously criticized, but also to take over such positions by making them central arguments in his own philosophical schemes. Lastly, I show that where Matolino seeks to avoid what he criticizes in Gyekye and other communitarians, the avoidance lands him in liberalism. Where his position coincides with those of earlier communitarians, Matolino lacks originality, and where his position differs, he falls out of communitarianism. The conclusion is that Matolino is unable to secure a distinct position as a communitarian.

**Keywords:** African philosophy, basic rights, communitarianism, liberalism

In its history, communitarianism has been an attempt to correct the excesses of liberalism, and recent streaks of liberalism in communitarian societies have been attempts to curtail the excesses of communitarianism. Both perspectives of society derive their balance from mutual checks in a symbiotic relationship. Instances of Western communitarianism have been reactions to the outbreak of liberal ideologies, and African communitarianism began as an attempt to check the cultural incursion of liberalism. The result is that the first wave of African communitarianism was radical; the second was reflectively moderate. Bernard Matolino's approach to this debate has been, first, to deny the second wave; second, to accept and laud it; and, third, to advocate a liberal perspective. In spite of his liberal advocacy, Matolino pleads not to be seen as a liberal. This, along with his inconsistent approach to moderate communitarianism, suggests that Matolino is struggling to determine what his position should be in the communitarian debate. This struggle results in an advocacy for the rights, freedoms, and autonomy of the

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## 22 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

individual. In my view, Matolino's concern about being seen as a liberal in a communitarian tradition is misplaced. I distinguish between 1) radical and moderate strands in the liberal tradition and 2) radical and moderate forms of communitarianism; 3) I use these distinctions to show that Matolino is a moderate liberal; and 4) I use the first distinction to argue that Matolino's liberalism is not a position he should be ashamed of.

I have divided the essay into five sections. The first section distinguishes between radical and moderate liberalism. I also outline a brief history of liberalism and how its radical version led to the emergence of radical communitarianism. The second section outlines the emergence of communitarianism and how the extremity of early radical communitarianism led to a moderate version of communitarianism. The third section explains Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism and how it attempted to differ from the early African communitarian positions. The fourth section outlines Bernard Matolino's critique of moderate communitarianism. I show that although Matolino's central argument is that Gyekye does not differ from the early communitarians, Matolino nullifies this argument by praising Gyekye for differing from the early communitarians, and even adopting Gyekye's advocacy for individual freedom, autonomy, and creativity. Matolino is aware that his main objection to Gyekye is that Gyekye acknowledges the priority of the community over the individual, a position that Matolino claims puts Gyekye in the same position with early communitarians. But I argue that any communitarianism (including the moderate kind) would need such a position to be communitarian *at all*. The fifth section observes that in espousing his own communitarianism, Matolino avoids this position by avoiding any statement implying that the community could be more important than the individual. But such a position is liberalist.

### **Liberalism and Communitarianism**

One of the common fallacies committed by some communitarians is to treat liberalism like a single straightforward proposition that should be either accepted or rejected. I call this the fallacy of composition: rejecting a whole due to the defect of only some of its parts. This fallacy is in full display in Martin Odei Ajei.<sup>1</sup> Like I have argued elsewhere, Ajei commits a fallacy of composition when he sets up a simple dichotomy between liberalism and communitarianism and rejects the rich tradition of liberalism in its whole because of the demerits of its radical versions. Ajei cherry-picks only those versions of liberalism that are suitable for his one-sided assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Ajei, "Kwasi Wiredu's Consensual Democracy: Prospects for Practice in Africa," in *European Journal of Political Theory*, 15:4 (2016), 445–466.

To make this fallacy very plain, Ajei writes to reject “the basic civil and political rights,” the “uncontroversial and urgent human rights.”<sup>2</sup> It does not occur to Ajei that his own culture recognizes many of these rights including the right to life. Ajei is silent on liberals who advocate versions of liberalism that are in fact communitarian, such as John Rawls’ acknowledgment of deep moral pluralism and his advocacy of a shared public conception of justice (which was described by Gerald Doppelt as communitarian liberalism acknowledging the community’s role whilst maintaining liberal principles).<sup>3</sup> Ajei also ignores a whole batch of moderate or “communitarian” liberals who advocate the value and role of the community within the liberal dispensation, including Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, Amartya Sen, and Martha Nussbaum. Matolino is also guilty of this fallacy when he advocates a liberal position yet expresses fear of being branded a liberal and argues that he should not be seen as one.<sup>4</sup>

Like liberalism, communitarianism also had its roots. It emerged to counteract the excesses of liberalism. The difference between community and communitarianism is that communities have always existed, but communitarianism (at least the political rather than the early Christian variant) is only a few centuries old, dating back to the German communitarianism of George Hegel, Ferdinand Tönnies, and other contemporaries. According to D. A. Masolo:

Deriving from Hegel, Western communitarianism maintains that the rights of individuals are not basic, and that the collective can have rights that are independent of, and even opposed to, what liberals claim are the rights of individuals. As is evident from this characterization, communitarianism in this sense directly or indirectly follows in the path of a philosophical romanticism by which the state found a new definition and a mystical meaning in the hands of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Doppelt, “Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism: Towards a Critical Theory of Social Justice,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 14 (1988), 281; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 441, cited in Roberto Alejandro, “Rawls’ Communitarianism,” in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 23:1 (1993), 78.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Matolino, *Consensus as Democracy in Africa* (Grahamstown: NISC/AHP, 2018), 9, 90, 99, and 120; Bernard Matolino, *Afro-Communitarian Democracy* (London: Lexington, 2019), 18, 60–61, and 114–115.

## 24 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

the nineteenth-century German historical school of which Hegel was part.<sup>5</sup>

Masolo narrates that the Germans were spurred toward communitarian thinking by their attempts to resist the invasion of the French emperor, who took advantage of a disunited Germany. The French invasion was not just military but cultural, and a cultural resistance was considered needful. In Masolo's words:

... a new mood developed among German writers and poets, turning their interests inward upon their own nation, their people, their race. For them the people, the Volk, was endowed not merely with a history, which obviously every people possesses, but also with a sort of mystical essence and value transcending both the merits of the nation's present members and the external facts of its past.<sup>6</sup>

Like the German example, Anglo-American and African versions of communitarianism emerged as reactions to "invasions" of different sorts (especially cultural invasions). Anglo-American communitarianism emerged to resist what it saw as the destabilizing effects of radical liberalism. In contrast to the emphasis on individual rights and autonomy in John Milton, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Immanuel Kant, Ronald Dworkin and others, an emphasis on community, its rights, and its primacy began to appear in Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, and some others.

In Africa, communitarianism emerged in the minds of the founding fathers of many African states, as a re-statement of tradition against the neoliberalist incursions from Western culture. Early African communitarians emphasized the priority of the community over the individual and made few, if any, remarks about individual rights. A more moderate version of communitarianism followed in the work of Kwame Gyekye, who objected to the radical claims of earlier communitarians and balanced his account by recognizing the existence of individual rights and autonomy within his traditional society. There has been a debate on whether Gyekye's moderate version differs significantly from that of earlier communitarians. I think there is indeed a difference, based on my engagement in this essay with Matolino and, to a lesser extent, Famakinwa.

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<sup>5</sup> D. A. Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison" in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. by Kwasi Wiredu (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 483.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Let me, at this point, make a clarification that will frame my discussion of Matolino's contribution to the communitarianism debate. When a scholar emphasizes only community responsibility without emphasizing individual rights, such a person is a radical communitarian. Thus, I agree with Gyekye on the use of this terminology to describe the early African communitarians before him. When a scholar gives emphasis to both community responsibility and individual rights, such a person is a moderate communitarian or moderate liberal depending on the relative weighting they give to the two variables. If the scholar tilts the balance a lit bit in favour of individual rights whilst still recognizing community responsibility, that person is a moderate liberal. I will show that this is Matolino's position. If the scholar tilts the balance a bit in favour of community responsibility whilst still acknowledging individual rights, such a position is moderately communitarian. As I will show, it is clear that this is Gyekye's position. To be a communitarian is, at bottom, to accord some kind of priority to the community. One cannot be a communitarian if he or she gives equal weighting to community or individual rights or gives a bit more emphasis to individual rights. The term communitarianism itself implies some form of priority for the community, and all versions of communitarianism fall within the scope of according such priority. The distinction between radical and moderate communitarianism is with the different weighting of priority given to the community.

When we find in a scholar's writings *only* a defense of individual rights and freedom, such a scholar is a liberal (since this is the definition of liberalism). If the scholar tempers his advocacy for individual rights and freedoms with an awareness of those of other individuals, then such a position is moderate liberalism. I am going to show that Bernard Matolino's contribution to the communitarian debate falls into this last category, and the mere fact that his contribution is in fact to a debate on communitarianism does not entitle him to call his theory "communitarianism."

### **Problems with Early (or Classical) African Communitarianism**

Radical liberalism seemed too focused on the individual at the expense of the community. But in my view, its proponents were seeking to safeguard the individual against state power abuse. They were writing in the context of the transition from feudalism and aristocracy to capitalism and democracy, and the major theme of the time was how to tame the power of the sovereign. The advocacy for individual rights was in fact a bulwark against totalitarianism and the tendency of totalitarian leaders to justify their actions by invoking the collective wellbeing of the community. First, these interpretations of liberalism make it clear that rights are rights of individuals,

## 26 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

which are claimed against the state and society as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Second is that we should hold these rights as so sacrosanct that we cannot subject them to bargaining or to the calculus of social (or community) interests.<sup>8</sup> These versions of liberalism hold the dignity of the individual in so much esteem that the individual is seen as “a small scale sovereign.”<sup>9</sup> The individual’s rights and dignity are so important that they can, if need be, “trump” wider social goals.<sup>10</sup> This school of scholars also argues that the autonomy of the individual bequeaths on her the right to choose her ends ‘not because such arrangement promotes overall human welfare, but because any arrangement that denied [the individual] that say would be a grave indignity.’<sup>11</sup> The readiness of this school to dispense with the community in preference for the individual could be seen when Mill argues that “if all of mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be in silencing mankind.”<sup>12</sup> This, in my view, is radical liberalism.

These scholars may have sought to protect the individual from the state. But in recent contexts they are interpreted as disregarding community cohesion and values. There is a lot of difference between a sovereign state and a cultural community, but it is not in the interest of the focus of this article for me to dwell on that analysis.

The crux of my foregoing gist is that some communitarians (including early African communitarians) responded to radical liberalism by taking positions at the other extreme end of the individual-community spectrum, positions so extreme that the individual was completely lost in community identity. The clearest example is John Mbiti’s account of how his people understand the relationship between the community and the individual. According to him, “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole groups happens to the individual. The individual can only say, ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’.”<sup>13</sup> The first President of Kenya said on behalf of his people,

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<sup>7</sup> See E. R. Howard, “Group versus individual identity in the African debate on human rights,” in *Human Rights in Africa: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by An-Na’im AA and Deng MF (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990), 159; Ajei, “Kwasi Wiredu’s Consensual Democracy,” 454.

<sup>8</sup> See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>9</sup> H. L. A. Hart, *Essays on Bentham: Studies in Jurisprudence and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 183.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Dworkin, “Rights as trumps,” in *Theories of Rights*, ed. by Jeremy Waldron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 153.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Quinn, *Morality and Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170.

<sup>12</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 76.

<sup>13</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 141.

according to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost, he is several people's relative and several people's contemporary ... The personal pronoun 'I' was used very rarely in public assemblies. The spirit of collectivism was much ingrained in the mind of the people.<sup>14</sup>

According to Kwame Gyekye, these communitarians give the impression that the individual is *wholly* constituted by social relationships.<sup>15</sup> This kind of communitarianism is generally silent on individual rights. The only mention of individual rights in this school of thought is by Ifeanyi Menkiti, who reluctantly accepted the reality of individual rights, but accorded them a secondary status. According to him, "in the African understanding, priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectivity, and their rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to their exercise of their duties."<sup>16</sup>

Gyekye has termed this kind of communitarianism *radical* communitarianism. I also find Matolino's use of the terminology "classical communitarianism" appropriate in describing these early communitarians of Africa. The terminology is fitting for both chronological and methodological reasons. Chronologically, it describes the works of the pioneer African communitarians. Methodologically, the early African ideas about communitarianism had a somewhat extreme perspective that later versions of communitarianism have sought to depart from.

### Moderate Communitarianism

Kwame Gyekye corrects what he sees as the extremity of classical communitarianism by demonstrating (with some African proverbs as evidence) that some degree of individual rights and autonomy existed in traditional African communities, and their existence does not support the version of communitarianism the classical communitarians are claiming. Referring to the classical communitarians, Gyekye writes, "in as much as all of the scholars referred to do not appear to fully recognize the status and relevance of individual rights, their views patently model the notion of

<sup>14</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 297 and 188.

<sup>15</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>16</sup> Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Personhood and Community in African Traditional Thought," in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. by R. A. Wright (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 180.

## 28 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

radical and unrestricted communitarianism. ... This notion of communitarianism I find hard to support.”<sup>17</sup> Gyekye accepts that a person is compulsorily born into a human community and thrust into social relationships (what Gyekye calls the individual’s natural sociality). This natural or compulsory feature of a society means that the community cannot be derivative of the individuals. And since it is the structure of the community that provides the “goals and life plans, and, through these activities” the individual becomes what she wants to be, Gyekye argues, “the cultural community must be held as prior to the individual.”<sup>18</sup> This position regarding the relationship between the individual and community, in my view, establishes Gyekye as a communitarian.

However, Gyekye says that his own communitarianism is not the same as those of the classical communitarians (whom he calls the radical communitarians). He starts by citing Senghor as arguing that African societies placed *more* emphasis on the group than on the individual.<sup>19</sup> Gyekye interprets this argument as moderate communitarianism because it does not ignore the status of the individual completely. Gyekye also cites some Akan proverbs showing the responsibilities of individuals for their own situations even within the community. Some of these proverbs include, “Life is as you make it yourself,” “It is by individual effort that we struggle for our heads,” and “Nobody cracks palm kernels with his (or her) teeth for another” and others.<sup>20</sup> Gyekye argues that these proverbs show that individuals are still responsible for their situation in life, despite being in communities, and that even a helper cannot completely take over the burden of an individual.

What is problematic about classical communitarianism is the impression they give that individual rights did not matter much. This is summarized by Menkiti’s argument that “rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to their (individuals’) duties.”<sup>21</sup> The fact that Menkiti mentions individual rights only once in his essay and his dismissive qualification of individual rights in this single mention as “whatever these may be” show the posture that Menkiti (and other classical communitarians) have adopted regarding individual rights. It is this general impression that Gyekye is trying to correct in arguing that the Akan proverbs regarding individuality are “evidence that the espousal of communal values does not in any way involve the rejection of individualistic values.”<sup>22</sup> Gyekye points out

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<sup>17</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 38.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Leopold Senghor, *On African Socialism*, trans. by Mercer Cook (New York: Praeger, 1964), 93-94; cited in Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Menkiti, “Personhood and Community in African Traditional Thought,” 180.

<sup>22</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 41.

that no society is absolutely communitarian or absolutely individualistic, but only some degree toward one or the other, and argues that we should recognize claims of communality and individuality as having the “status of equal moral standing.”<sup>23</sup>

Before I turn to the rest of Kwame Gyekye’s account, it is worth noting that the view of the individual and society as having equal moral standing does not sit well with his earlier claim that the community is prior to the individual. The latter statement is more appropriate to communitarianism of any sort, including the moderate kind. Moderate communitarianism is still communitarianism (an argument for some kind of priority or the other of community responsibility over individual rights). What distinguishes moderate communitarianism is its argument that individual autonomy and rights matter a bit more than classical communitarianism asserts. But it is unnecessary for moderate communitarianism to advance the argument that the two are of equal moral standing, for this leads anyone to question what is communitarian at all about moderate communitarianism, and such an argument could lay claim to the titles “moderate communitarianism” and “moderate individualism” with equal measure.

J. O. Famakinwa argued that Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism is not different from radical communitarianism because Gyekye gave priority to the community over the individual<sup>24</sup> and gave priority to social over individual values, for instance, to love over justice. He denies that Gyekye’s theory is moderate communitarianism because, “though Gyekye recognizes the rights of the individual, he never considers them to be the primary social value.”<sup>25</sup> This argument is incorrect because moderate communitarianism is *still* communitarianism, and communitarianism of *any sort* is the giving of priority to the community over the individual. If Gyekye did not prioritize the community in any way, there would be no logical warrant to include “communitarianism” in describing Gyekye’s theory.

Gyekye stresses on what he calls the natural sociality of the person: the fact that community life is not optional.<sup>26</sup> But Gyekye argues that although the individual is by nature a social being, she is “other things as well” because the individual has rationality and is capable of choice.<sup>27</sup> In as much as these play roles in the formation and execution of the individual’s plans and goals, personhood cannot be fully defined and constituted by the communal

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> J. O. Famakinwa, “How Moderate is Kwame Gyekye’s Moderate Communitarianism?” in *Thought and Practice*, 2: 2 (2010), 65-77.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

## 30 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

structure.<sup>28</sup> Gyekye argues that failure to recognize this could lead to investing the community with “an all-engulfing moral authority to determine all the things about the life of the individual.”<sup>29</sup> Gyekye argues that authors such as Mbiti, Menkiti and other radical communitarians are guilty of this failure.

On the notion of personhood (which has implications for communitarianism), Gyekye agrees with Menkiti that personhood in traditional African conceptions is a moral concept: it has to be attained according to how an individual participates in community life in discharging her duties, but he disagrees with Menkiti that personhood is attained through certain rites of incorporation, his reason being that it is moral acts that confer personhood rather than mere ceremonial rites.<sup>30</sup> Gyekye also disagrees with Menkiti that personhood is attained by gaining age, and that there is such a thing as “full personhood.” Gyekye argues that elderly people are not necessarily moral since there are elderly people “known to be wicked, ungenerous, unsympathetic, whose lives, in short, generally do not reflect moral maturity or excellence.”<sup>31</sup>

Having said these, Gyekye notes that according to the conception of his people the Akan, an individual who is not seen as a person is someone who is known to be generally unethical, rather than someone who experiences occasional moral lapses. And even so, those considered not to be persons are not denied their rights or cease to become objects of moral concern.<sup>32</sup> Persons who live isolated lives are also considered not to be persons. More generally, to be a person is a moral statement, implying that we become persons by performing moral duties and participating in the community. To some extent, becoming economically self-sufficient also leads to people being called persons, but economic acquisition still needs moral acquisition to confer the title of person.<sup>33</sup>

Gyekye restates his thesis that persons are not wholly defined by the community because persons might evaluate community norms and find them wanting. This means that persons are able to distance themselves from the community to be able to evaluate it.<sup>34</sup> The community does not also wholly define persons because individuals have the capacity for self-assertion, and the freedom to choose their destiny. The fact that certain visionary leaders are described as “ahead of their times” also means that persons can climb over

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

cultural walls and that those walls “may not be as cloistering as it might be supposed.”<sup>35</sup> Gyekye reminds us, “... the European societies from which individuals emerged in the twilight of the medieval period and contributed the ideas that spearheaded the rise of Western modernity were communal societies,” as well as the Greek societies from which Socrates, Plato and others emerged.<sup>36</sup> Restating his communitarian position, Gyekye adds, “But even so, the innovative activities of such an individual are intended to extend and enrich, rather than entirely break with certain aspects of the community’s history.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Gyekye, moderate communitarianism recognizes a dual conception of the self: the self as an autonomous, assertive being, and the self as a communal being.<sup>38</sup> Thus moderate communitarianism is “not obsessed with rights” as it also upholds concern for the common good.<sup>39</sup> Gyekye also argues that one right is another’s duty, but in communitarian societies, we help others not always because they hold it as a right against us, but because of our moral responsiveness to their situations whether it is their right or not.<sup>40</sup> But as an autonomous, self-assertive being, the individual should also care for herself as much as she cares for others.<sup>41</sup>

### **Matolino’s Problem with Gyekye’s Moderate Communitarianism**

Matolino is not convinced that Gyekye successfully differentiates moderate communitarianism from radical communitarianism. Matolino’s main reason is that radical communitarians also recognized individual rights like Gyekye does. Matolino reminds us that Menkiti recognized rights, although granted them a secondary status. Matolino notes that Gyekye argues for the existence of rights, and Matolino argues that Gyekye contradicts himself when he writes that moderate communitarianism is not obsessed with rights.<sup>42</sup> Matolino asks what Gyekye is instead obsessed with, and concludes that Gyekye prizes harmony, peace, stability, and solidarity. This, for Matolino, puts Gyekye in the same position as radical (or classical) communitarianism.<sup>43</sup> A quite absurd assumption of Matolino is that Gyekye is required to be obsessed with something (as if obsession is as beneficial to

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Matolino, “Radicals versus Moderates: A Critique of Gyekye’s Moderate Communitarianism,” in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 28:2 (2009), 168.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

## 32 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

life as food and water), so if Gyekye is not obsessed with individual rights then he must be obsessed with community responsibility.

I think that Matolino misinterprets Gyekye. First, I do not think that obsession is a requirement in theorizing. Second, the fact that Gyekye emphasizes individual rights and also prizes social harmony and stability do not constitute a contradiction. This is because emphasizing individual rights does not exclude prizing social cohesion. If Matolino thinks exclusion is implied, he needs to demonstrate it.

Matolino's second attack is that Gyekye defends individual rights, but that the radical communitarians *could also* do the same.<sup>44</sup> The radical communitarians in fact did not do this. And it is absurd to see how a communitarian theory could be "radical" by defending human rights. Matolino then cites an argument of Gyekye's showing that Gyekye is truly a radical communitarian. According to the cited argument, Gyekye writes:

Individual rights, the exercise of which is meaningful only within the context of human society, must therefore be matched with social responsibilities. In the absence of the display of sensitivity to such responsibilities, the community will have to take the steps necessary to maintain its integrity and stability. The steps are likely to involve abridging individual rights, which, thus, will be regarded by the moderate communitarian as not absolute, though important.<sup>45</sup>

Matolino's point here is that Gyekye is a radical communitarian because Gyekye matches rights with responsibilities. This, for Matolino, puts Gyekye "at the par with Menkiti here because he has also effectively given rights a secondary importance as Menkiti does."<sup>46</sup> I do not think that Matolino's argument is correct because I am not convinced that matching rights with responsibilities makes one a radical communitarian. I think that talking about rights alone without responsibilities would not make Gyekye a communitarian *at all*. Not even mainstream liberal theories talk about rights alone, only the radical liberals do. So it is too far-fetched to argue that Gyekye needs to advocate for rights alone to be seen as advocating moderate communitarianism.

In fact, matching rights with responsibilities is not even sufficient to make one a communitarian. What makes one a communitarian is not just the matching of rights with responsibilities, but the elevating of the community

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>45</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Matolino, "Radicals versus Moderates," 169.

responsibilities to a higher priority compared to rights. The word “communitarian” derives from the stem word “community” and means “tending toward community.” Any version of communitarianism would not only match rights with responsibilities but also elevate responsibilities above rights. Even Gyekye’s theory is *not properly communitarian* when he argues that person and community have equal moral status. The word “communitarianism” cannot describe such a position. What makes Gyekye a communitarian *at all* is when he argues that since it is the structure of the community that provides the goals and activities through which the individual becomes what she wants to be, the community “must be held as prior to the individual.”<sup>47</sup> The difference between moderate and radical communitarianism would therefore not be whether responsibilities are elevated above rights, but whether responsibilities were discussed and emphasized *alone* without discussing rights.

I think that Matolino implicitly acknowledges my clarification because he demonstrates elsewhere that he accepts that Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism differs from radical communitarianism. What Matolino strives to do is show that Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism is not different from that of radical communitarians. But Matolino contradicts himself elsewhere by reversing all his arguments and accepting Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism. He writes:

In African philosophy, I find the distinction made by Gyekye between radical and moderate communitarianism useful. It is useful for its ability to separate what we can consider to be an exaggerated version of communitarianism against a more sober and realistic version of communitarianism.<sup>48</sup>

It seems to me that by “exaggeration” Matolino refers to the sole emphasis on duty to the community by radical communitarians. Matolino again contradicts himself by arguing that Gyekye indeed differs from the radical communitarians. According to Matolino:

Kwame Gyekye’s identification of a particular conceptualization of community as radical has not only ended with such an identification. What followed this identification was a concerted effort to show its philosophical errors, and much energy was invested in

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<sup>47</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 40.

<sup>48</sup> Matolino, *Afro-communitarian Democracy*, 58.

## 34 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

restating the proper tenets of traditional community. Gyekye's (1997) and Masolo's (2010) arguments state something that must surely be an obvious fact of human existence. Their argument that any social structure, no matter how communitarian it is, will have to reckon with issues of individuality and other factors associated with individuality is a little obvious, but had to be stated with force in the light of some false claims made on behalf of the African sense of community.<sup>49</sup>

Matolino agrees with Gyekye that there is something objectionable about radical communitarianism. He writes:

My evaluation leans toward the view that consensus has failed to capture a usable and philosophically defensible communitarian framework. In its attempts at valorizing community or pressing hard for the reality of the community over the individual, it advocates a version of communitarianism which is as objectionable as what Gyekye has termed radical communitarianism.<sup>50</sup>

Matolino acknowledges that Gyekye secured a space for the discussion of rights within a communitarian framework. According to Matolino:

Even though Gyekye fails to secure the place of rights in his communitarianism, and has been rightly criticized for that failure, at least he recognizes the inevitability of those rights. Those who build on this inevitability continue with the tradition of recognizing individuality within a communal scheme. Such recognition has serious political implications as it leads to a polity that openly defends the rights of the individual, even within a communal framework.<sup>51</sup>

This argument shows that Matolino does not believe that radical communitarians accommodated rights in their communitarian scheme. But elsewhere Matolino contradicts this when he writes that the treatment given

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<sup>49</sup> Matolino, *Afro-communitarian Democracy*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

by both radical and moderate communitarianism to individual rights are the same. According to him:

Gyekye is at the par with Menkiti here because he has also effectively given rights a secondary importance as Menkiti does. It must be remembered that Menkiti does not completely reject the importance of rights. He merely states that whatever the importance of human rights could be, it is secondary to the importance of the community. In all important respects the views match each other.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to this argument, Matolino yet again acknowledges elsewhere the difference between radical and moderate communitarianism, as he writes, "In some cases the extreme view of community might not leave room for individual rights and in other cases some restricted view of community seeks to recognize and give due recognition to individual rights."<sup>53</sup>

Elsewhere, Matolino also exposes other aspects of Gyekye's distinction between moderate and radical communitarianism, which debunk Matolino's own claim that the two versions of communitarianism are the same. Matolino writes:

what should be accepted is the claim made by Gyekye that while the individual is a communally embedded entity, she is other things as well. The other things that he refers to are will, memory, rationality, and capacity for virtue. Gyekye admits that the community nurtures these entities but crucially he insists that the community does not make these entities. The crucial difference between his position and the radical view, especially as espoused by Menkiti, is precisely around this point.<sup>54</sup>

Criticizing radical communitarianism, Matolino writes, "The actual value that is at stake and has to be defended is one that is identified by Gyekye as that the community will obsess about its stability. In obsessing about its stability it would then not hesitate to do everything in its power to ensure that such stability is not tampered with."<sup>55</sup> Matolino also writes, "As

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<sup>52</sup> Matolino, "Radicals versus Moderates," 169.

<sup>53</sup> Matolino, *Afro-communitarian Democracy*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

## 36 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

Gyekye argues, the reality of the community, as a constitutive element of the individual, is only partial.”<sup>56</sup> Summing up the relevance of Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism, Matolino writes, “All we need to do is to accept that his (Gyekye’s) critique deals a devastating blow to the sort of communitarianism that Menkiti and Wiredu espouse.”<sup>57</sup>

In his attempt to distinguish moderate from radical communitarianism, Gyekye argued that although the individual is a social being, she is other things as well. referring to these ‘other things’, Gyekye writes:

I have in mind such essential attributes of the person as rationality, having a moral sense and capacity for virtue and, hence, for evaluating and making moral judgments: all this means that the individual is capable of choice. If we do not choose to be social - because we are social by nature - neither do we choose to be intelligent or rational beings with a moral sense (or, capacity for virtue).<sup>58</sup>

Gyekye had argued that the position of radical communitarianism does not give adequate attention to individual creativity, inventiveness, imagination and idealistic proclivities.<sup>59</sup> Matolino rejects this claim and argues that nothing shows that radical communitarianism oppresses or rejects these individual qualities. According to Matolino, “I do not think that Gyekye’s argument succeeds. He merely assumes that what he terms unrestricted communitarianism will stifle individual talent and originality. He does not show what precise element in the radical communitarian scheme would be responsible for that.”<sup>60</sup> But elsewhere in distinguishing his own communitarianism from “old communitarianism” (which includes the moderate communitarianism of Gyekye), Matolino writes, “The communitarian value that will support political survival of any given community is one that prioritizes the possibility of the free-spirited nature of human creativity.”<sup>61</sup> Matolino actually accuses the old communitarianism of underplaying innovation and inventiveness when he writes, “Innovation and inventiveness are qualities that are not overtly promoted by the sub-Saharan pedigree as outlined by supporters of the old version of communitarianism. The history of the denial of the importance of individual inventiveness is to

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>58</sup> Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 53.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>60</sup> Matolino, “Radicals versus Moderates,” 168.

<sup>61</sup> Matolino, *Afro-communitarian Democracy*, 139.

be found from nationalists right down to modern defenders of the romanticized version of communitarianism.”<sup>62</sup> So what we see from Matolino is a tendency to criticize others for a position and, later, deny that they took that position and adopt the same position.

Matolino actually identifies creativity and innovation as the central point of his version of communitarianism. He writes:

The responsibility I have in mind has to do with how the individual sees herself as completely free but responsible in her creativity. It is from such free but responsible creativity that the community is made. The community that is made is one that is truly representative of free engagement between different agents which results in the given community. The benefit of this free engagement is the creation of a community that may just as well exhibit characteristics that are consistent with a spirit of free inquiry.<sup>63</sup>

For saying that the individual is “completely free but responsible in her creativity,” Matolino earns the qualification of a *moderate* liberal because he tampered his liberalism with a sense of responsibility to the community. Matolino then makes creativity, innovation, self-assertion and the individual’s capacity for choice as the pillar of his new supposed communitarianism. I will shortly attend to Matolino’s supposed communitarianism in the next section.

Matolino praises Gyekye for arguing that although the individual is a social being, she is ‘other things’ as well: she has rationality, memory, and the capacity for virtue. But this undermines Matolino’s general argument that Gyekye does not differ from radical communitarianism. Matolino in fact adopts this argument in his critique of communitarianism. He writes, “What makes communitarianism work in the way it does, politically, is that it tends to whittle the nonsocial features of the self to a negligible role. Once this is achieved it moves to make communal concerns the overarching principle of both individual and political identity.”<sup>64</sup>

Matolino goes further to build his communitarian theory by focusing on the non-social aspects of the individual. He writes:

Gyekye correctly points this out in his attempts to develop moderate communitarianism when he states

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–106.

## 38 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

that while a person is a communitarian entity bound in, and influenced by her community, she is other things as well. What I sought to demonstrate in my earlier work was the importance of these other things.<sup>65</sup>

No communitarianism of any sort would focus on the non-social aspects of the individual. I will come back to this point, since it indicates individualism. My general conclusion from this section is that from the contradictions I have outlined, Matolino's approach to Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is not consistent.

### **Matolino's Proposed Communitarianism**

To avoid the pitfalls that Matolino attributes to Gyekye (emphasizing community as well as individual values), Matolino strives in his own version of communitarianism to emphasize *only* individualistic values. He makes references to community but avoids implicating himself as arguing that the community can have any priority over the individual. He starts his project by arguing:

A communalistic view is one that is normally articulated as a traditional way of life that was found in African communities before they were spoilt by foreign intervention. Its traditionalistic worldview is seen as a purely untainted and instructive of how Africans understood life and values that were associated with a communal way of life. From this communalistic understanding of the arrangement of traditional life, a communitarian theory may spring forth.<sup>66</sup>

But, continuing, Matolino seeks to divest his communitarianism of communal underpinnings, when he writes:

Such a communitarian theory would be one that emphasizes the values found in communal setups. A communitarian theory, however, does not always have to depend on antiquated realities of communal societies. A communitarian theory may be able to articulate and defend ethos that are not necessarily consistent with

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

ones found in actual traditional communalistic societies. The key difference between communalism and communitarianism is to be found in communalist theories or practices that are normally restricted to the local understanding of life. Never extending beyond the clan, family, or restricted sense of community as one based on kinship or the institution of kingship, communalist practices are of a sort that is true of traditional tight knit societies.<sup>67</sup>

According to Matolino, “The sort of communitarianism I have in mind is one that is specifically responsive to the situation and reality that Africa finds itself in.”<sup>68</sup>

Going into the content of his communitarianism, Matolino begins by specifying aspects of the old communitarianism that he rejects, such as the idea that human interests are completely collapsible,<sup>69</sup> a human value that is specific to a particular communitarian ethos.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Matolino finds acceptable a value that is universal to humans as humans. Specifying this value, he writes, “... my position is that regard and recognition for the other is what can be truly a communitarian value.”<sup>71</sup> Matolino does not deny the relevance of traditional ideas, but argues that what we need are “systems that will be able to work for the betterment of humanity in the here and now.”<sup>72</sup> Situating his communitarianism in a modern African city, Matolino writes:

If we choose to take the path that communities must have an absolutely close identity or as close an identity as possible, then difference will be a hindrance to that goal. But if we see the notion of community as an ever-evolving possibility that is neither hostile to difference nor intolerant of innovation, then we will look for minimal ways that seek to effectively manage difference without either valorizing it or undermining it.<sup>73</sup>

Matolino also disagrees with the old communitarian debate of seeing the community and individual as opposed, and argues that they should be

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

## 40 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

seen as complementary, and advocates (like Gyekye) the moral equality of the individual and the community.<sup>74</sup> According to the analysis I have already made, this is not communitarianism of any kind.

Matolino then argues that radical communitarianism “suppresses freedom.”<sup>75</sup> This sits in unhealthy tension with his argument that Gyekye accused radical communitarianism of not paying adequate attention to individual creativity, inventiveness, imagination and idealistic proclivities, for freedom is needed to exercise these qualities in any society-changing way. As a major part of his ‘communitarianism’, Matolino argues extensively for freedom.<sup>76</sup> Matolino is even harsher than Gyekye in accusing communitarianism of stifling individual freedom. He writes:

Communitarianism does not only give a choice, but it also gives specifications about the choice to be made, and it proceeds to impose heavy sanctions on those who do not choose as it prescribes. It denies them a standing as agents who are capable of anything including making that choice, it denies them an identity, and it eventually condemns them to the margins of existence by withholding statuses that otherwise are naturally applicable to other persons.<sup>77</sup>

In designating the structure of the kind of communitarianism he wishes for modern African societies, what Matolino ends up doing is advocate a system that enhances good governance. He writes:

I am not advocating the retrieval of some saintly state of Africa or some essentialized outline of what Africanity is. On the contrary, what I am going to suggest is an idea of how Africa can, through reliance on its own intellectual resources of analyzing its current structures and practices, get itself on a path of government and economic systems that really care for the people.<sup>78</sup>

Matolino then explains that the communitarian structure he has in mind is one that takes the dignity of individuals seriously.<sup>79</sup> He explains that

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 139–142.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

the dignity he refers to is one that emanates from the individual's capacity to be self-determining,<sup>80</sup> to fashion and create,<sup>81</sup> and to recognize the other.<sup>82</sup> Matolino's argument is that the realization that we are in a community makes mutual recognition important for creating human dignity. He writes, "The notion of dignity and its subsequent application will be what makes human societies to become human communities. It is in the recognition of the dignity of each that we secure a human community that appears to have become elusive in the current African polity and political practice."<sup>83</sup>

The common themes in Matolino's "communitarianism" are individual dignity, individual capacity for choice, individual capacity for creativity, and individual capacity to recognize other individuals. Concluding, Matolino has this to say of his version of communitarianism, "In concluding this section I wish to outline what the communitarianism I have in mind will seek to do as a political theory vis-à-vis the individual. The theory I have in mind is one that takes the issue of individuality so seriously that it seeks to protect the reality of the individual both as a matter of reality for that individual and reality for the community."<sup>84</sup> But in my view, what Matolino advocates is *liberalism*. This is because advocating individual freedom, dignity, capacity for choice establishes Matolino as a liberal. Arguing that dignity is enhanced when we recognize the dignity of others (a mutual recognition of dignities) tempers Matolino's liberalism a bit and establishes Matolino as a moderate liberal. But Matolino's theory is not communitarianism of any kind (moderate or radical) because he avoids any proposition that even remotely suggests that the community has some importance that could make it prior to the importance of individual rights.

I have already clarified that arguing for individual rights and attributes alone is individualism or liberalism. Arguing for individual rights as well as community responsibility can either be moderate liberalism or moderate communitarianism (depending on the relative weights given to the two variables). Advocating both individual rights and community responsibility and giving a little more weight to community responsibility is moderate communitarianism. Arguing for community responsibility alone is radical or extreme communitarianism. By refusing to concede any superior weight to community responsibility, Matolino finds himself in a liberalist position. As if aware of this, Matolino pleads in as many as seven places

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 165–167.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–169.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

## 42 WHERE COMMUNITARIANISM STOPS

(across two books) not to be seen as a liberal.<sup>85</sup> In one of these places, he writes:

It is important to emphasize that the recognition of individual rights within a communal framework must not be seen as advocacy of liberalism. While talk of individual rights and all attempts to show their inviolability has come to be associated with the liberal tradition, that must not be interpreted as either an exclusive concern of liberalism or that those who engage in the defense of individual rights are necessarily sympathetic to the doctrine of liberalism.<sup>86</sup>

In another place Matolino writes:

I think the most serious challenge that can be posed to my position would be that there is something fundamentally un-communitarian about my proposal. The charge could be formulated along the lines that I have simply resorted to a liberal posture of presenting the individual as the ultimate arbiter of interpersonal relations, mores, and communal significance in individuals' status.<sup>87</sup>

However, given my distinction between radical and moderate liberalism and between radical and moderate communitarianism, Matolino has his failure to clarify liberalism to blame for being worried about being seen as a liberalist. The current attitude to radical liberalism is the reason why non-Western scholars such as Matolino consider it important to plead for the safety of their careers whilst insisting on a core principle they are convinced is philosophically unproblematic.

### Conclusion

I have attempted in this essay to distinguish between: (1) radical and moderate liberalism, (2) radical and moderate communitarianism, and (3) used the distinctions to show that Matolino is a moderate liberal.

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<sup>85</sup> Matolino, *Consensus as Democracy in Africa*, 9, 90, 99, and 120; Matolino, *Afro-Communitarian Democracy*, 18, 60–61, and 114–115.

<sup>86</sup> Matolino, *Afro-Communitarian Democracy*, 60–61.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–115.

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# Expanding Social Reproduction, Criticalizing Care: Two Models of Philosophical Under-labouring in the Global Crisis of Care<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Social scientific researches, many undertaken with a feminist or gender lens, have sought to understand the root causes of inequalities and provide solutions to the care crisis caused by the precarious migration of domestic work from the Global South to the Global North. We ask what the distinct contribution of philosophical research has been to care crisis scholarship and suggest two models—from social reproduction theory and care ethics. We argue that the expansion of social reproduction by Nancy Fraser (Part 1) and the criticalization of the concept of care by Fiona Robinson (Part 2) became engaged in conceptual clarification, conceptual reconstruction, and second-order analysis. These two thinkers undertook philosophical under-labouring as a necessary first step in their critical-emancipatory interventions in the transnational care chain. Traditional and contemporary usages of the Lockean notion of the philosopher as under-labourer and its manifestations in second-wave feminist analysis are discussed in the Introduction. The Conclusion integrates the implications of Fraser’s and Robinson’s clarification and reconstruction of reproductive work and care, which are key analytical concepts in care crisis studies not only for research, discussions, and debates in the global crisis of care but also for policy formulation and transformative action.

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<sup>1</sup> This theoretical paper grew out of our research, titled “From Feminine to Feminist: Reassessing Global Care Labor and the Detriment of its Growing Deficit at the Homefront,” funded by Polytechnic University of the Philippines covering the period August–November 2024. Subsequently, a conference paper, titled, “From Feminine to Feminist: Care Ethics, AIs and ICTs in the Global Care Economy,” was presented at the 2024 Annual International Conference of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines, in cooperation with PUP and VISCA, held in Visayas State University, Baybay City, Leyte, on 18–20 July 2024.

**Keywords:** Care ethics, critical theory of care, philosophical under-labouring, social reproduction theory

## Second-Wave Feminism and the Philosopher as Under-labourer<sup>2</sup>

Theorization of women's unpaid housework and caring roles is as old as feminism itself. Already incipient in the first wave's demand for equal work opportunities in the public sphere, women's domestic and caring work became foundational to two theories borne out of the second wave's calls for the rethinking of Marx's economic theory of productive labour, i.e., the underpaid and exploited labour by the working class that fuelled capitalism: 1) social reproduction theory in political economy, which assigns equal value to women's domestic and child-rearing activities known as reproductive work, and 2) care ethics in moral philosophy, which radically reorganizes culture based on women's differential values and competencies for caring.

Second-wave feminists radically shifted focus from first-order demands (rights to suffrage, paid jobs, freedom of expression, equality) to second-order interrogations of deep-seated causes of women's oppression under the dominant ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism. Philosophical under-labouring was manifested in feminist conceptual clarification and reconstruction and in digging up sedimented ontological, epistemological, and moral presuppositions that were the conditions of possibility of the oppressive system as well as in working out what concepts and presuppositions, in turn, would make an emancipatory alternative possible.

It was John Locke, confronted by the tremendous scientific progress in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the comparably lacklustre achievements of philosophy, who first suggested philosophy's much humbler role of serving as under-labourer for science.<sup>3</sup> Locke's plea for philosophy's task as that of clearing the ground a little from rubbish that obfuscated knowledge was a far cry from the royal ambitions of speculative metaphysicians and system builders of the time. Inspired by Locke, philosophy as conceptual and language clarification eventually characterized 20<sup>th</sup> century analytic and

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<sup>2</sup> The hyphenated and British-English word, "under-labourer" was used by John Locke and Roy Bhaskar and is adopted as well in this article.

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, "The Epistle to the Reader," in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 10–11.

ordinary language philosophy viewing philosophy as therapeutic, as elucidation,<sup>4</sup> or as descriptive of the underlying structures of reality.<sup>5</sup>

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Roy Bhaskar re-animated the under-labouring task of philosophy for science and the human sciences, but this time not just for academic but also for critical-emancipatory ends.<sup>6</sup> In his earliest work, *A Realist Theory of Science*, he aimed at a philosophy that has greater relevance to the current scientific practice: “a philosophy *for* science,” so to speak, rather than a philosophy *of* science. He wrote: “For I willingly confess to Lockean motives. That is to say, I believe it to be an essential (though not the only) part of the business of philosophy, to act as under-labourer, and occasionally as the mid-wife, of science.”<sup>7</sup> Reiterating a division of labour between philosophy and the sciences, in *The Possibility of Naturalism*, he wrote, “philosophy is distinguished by the kinds of considerations and arguments it employs.”<sup>8</sup> Philosophy’s distinct argumentative method is transcendental-realist, such that vis-à-vis the sciences, philosophy’s task is “to show what must be the case for the ensemble of scientific activities to be possible.”<sup>9</sup> This transcendental question has the form “what must be the case

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<sup>4</sup> The epitome of a philosopher who performed philosophical under-labouring not only for the sciences but upon philosophy itself was Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued that there are no genuine philosophical problems but only pseudo ones arising from logical or linguistic confusion. And this is a common thread uniting his early and later works.

Wittgenstein wrote in the *Tractatus*: “Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical” as they “arise from our failure to understand the logic of our language.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 19.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, he wrote, “What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle,” in support of the idea that philosophical problems are not real but are invented in the mind of the philosopher as they take language from its daily use to a holiday “for philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 103, 19.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1959). Strawson distinguished descriptive metaphysics from the prescriptive one of traditional system-builders who ordered reality from preconceived ultimate principles.

<sup>6</sup> The two books authored by Bhaskar where he argues for critical-emancipatory under-labouring are *A Realist Theory of Science* (1975) and *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (1979), all republished by Routledge. While Bhaskar’s founding of critical realism and naturalism were the objective of his philosophical writings, this article is limited to his methodology, specifically, his deployment of the method of philosophical under-labouring. We believe the method can be explicated effectively for the purposes of this paper, without delving into his philosophical positions or his critical-emancipatory projects.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), xxxi.

<sup>8</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (Brighton Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1979), 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

for  $\Phi$  to be possible?"<sup>10</sup> or what must the world be like for the ensemble of activities ( $\Phi$ ) to be possible? For Bhaskar, while both philosophy and science produce knowledge, the knowledge produced by philosophy is "knowledge of the necessary conditions for the production of knowledge—second-order knowledge, if you like."<sup>11</sup> By 2013, Bhaskar's critical-realist emancipatory project has been solidified and widely adopted, and he reiterated: "philosophical under-labouring is most characteristically what critical realist philosophy does."<sup>12</sup> In sum, for Bhaskar, philosophical under-labouring for science and the human sciences consists in a transcendentalist "movement at any one level from knowledge of manifest phenomena to knowledge of the structures that generate them."<sup>13</sup> Bhaskar's ultimate aim is to found critical emancipatory projects, such that the transcendental movement takes the form: Given oppressive systems in the real world, what are the second-order structures that make them possible, and once overcome or transformed, will result in emancipation?

In the case of social reproduction theory, the system to be challenged was capitalism in its various historical mutations. In contrast, in the case of care ethics, Western European ethical systems—whether of the utilitarian or deontological kind—were challenged, because they were symptomatic of questionable presuppositions, such as androcentrism and individualistic ontology that needed to be scrutinized and supplanted with assumptions and concepts friendlier to the notion of caring as the true north of the ethical compass. The following sections will discuss these theories in two parts.

### Part 1: Nancy Fraser's Expansion of Social Reproduction

Arguably, Nancy Fraser has woven the most expansive theory of social reproduction resulting from her 1) more encompassing reconceptualization of a) political economy into cultural political economy, b) capitalism from a solely economic to an entire social system, and c) socialism from a transitory stage to the classless society to democratic socialism; 2) widening the axes of capitalist exploitation from class only to gender, culture, and nature imbricating upon each other. This "expansionist" project, if we may, likewise entailed refinements but a more encompassing reach of reproductive work, because it is always the indispensable life

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Roy Bhaskar, "Prolegomenon: The Consequences of the Revindication of Philosophical Ontology for Philosophy and Social Theory," in *Engaging with the World: Agency, Institutions, Historical Formations*, ed. by Margaret S. Archer and Andrea M. Maccarini (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

support system in the contradictory productive–reproductive chain. The discussion that follows explicates these expansions in Fraser’s selected writings, lectures, and interviews, focusing on the concept of women’s social reproductive work.

*From Physiocratic Origins to a Feminist Analytical Concept: Social Reproduction Redefined*

The gradual expansion of the concept of social reproduction from its origins until its current status as the underbelly of production are well documented in feminist historical accounts.<sup>14</sup>

Excavation work by socialist feminists in 1970s to 1990 surfaced a form of exploitation heretofore unrecognized by all revolutionaries, whether Marxist or anarchist: capitalism did not only extract cheap labour from the working class to sustain itself but also, and worse, from “the workday of millions of unwaged house-workers as well as many other unpaid and unfree labourers.”<sup>15</sup> Silvia Federici, writing half a century later in 2019, recalled that the concept “social reproduction” was redefined by socialist feminists as “work reproducing the worker” from its original usage by physiocrats, like Quesnay, as “the processes by which a social system reproduces itself.”<sup>16</sup> Federici then outlined the implications of social reproduction as an analytical category, what the crisis of care is, and the vision that propelled it. Social reproduction “made possible a new understanding of the mechanisms by which capitalist society has been reproduced,”<sup>17</sup> that is basically through the “crisis of social reproduction” caused by the defunding of social services, the “politics of extractivism” (nature’s exploitation as capital), and the “permanent state of warfare.”<sup>18</sup> The end goal was to revive Marx’s vision of unalienated and humanizing labour that placed life at the centre.

In that same year, 2019, Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Battacharya, and Nancy Fraser issued a manifesto in *Feminism for the 99%*, laying down the contours of the reproductive crisis, its underlying conditions of possibility, and the feminist agenda required:

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<sup>14</sup> Historical accounts of social reproduction are found in Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Battacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*. (London: Verso, 2019); Tithi Battacharya ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017); Susan Ferguson, *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Silvia Federici, “Social Reproduction Theory: History, Issues and Present Challenges,” in *Radical Philosophy*, 204 (Spring 2019), 55.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

As feminists, we appreciate that capitalism is not just an economic system, but something larger: an institutionalized social order that also encompasses the apparently “noneconomic” relations and practices that sustain the official economy. Behind capitalism’s official institutions—wage labor, production, exchange, and finance—stand their necessary supports and enabling conditions: families, communities, nature; territorial states, political organizations, and civil societies; and not least of all, massive amounts and multiple forms of unwaged and expropriated labor, including much of the work of social reproduction, still performed largely by women and often uncompensated. These, too, are constitutive elements of capitalist society—and sites of struggle within it.<sup>19</sup>

The statement has become a standard description of social reproduction and its crisis: social reproduction is work done mostly by women to maintain and reproduce humanity, and yet it is drained and devoured by the very system it reproduces, leading to the anomalous condition called “crisis of care,” i.e., the “tendency to commandeer for capital’s benefit as much ‘free’ reproductive labor as possible,” without any concern for its replenishment, exhausting women, ravaging families, and stretching social energies “to the breaking point.”<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, capitalism is widened from a mere economic to an entirely social system. The manifesto pointed to the work done by Fraser in expanding the concepts of capitalism and capitalist crisis under which the crisis of social reproduction formed one strand.

### *Social Reproduction in the Grand Scheme of Things*

While critiquing Marx, social reproduction theorists retained a fidelity to Marx’s vision of unalienated work or the notion that labour is an expression of human creativity, thus, humanizing and liberating. This vision undergirds Fraser’s works on social reproduction. But alongside her Marxian lineage, Fraser too deployed the method of analytic philosophy. As Caitlín Doherty noted in her 2023 essay on Fraser’s critical theory, Fraser has deployed her training in analytic philosophy in “positing sets of conceptual distinctions—shorthand terms for complex strategic perspectives or political-

<sup>19</sup> Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%*, 63.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

## 50 EXPANDING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

philosophical ideas, whose logics she then unfolds.”<sup>21</sup> For Doherty, Fraser’s conceptual schemas and analytical distinctions, notwithstanding they are abstractions, are heuristic necessities that illuminate complex realities.<sup>22</sup>

### *Critical Theory and Women’s Reproductive Work*

Fraser’s thematization of social reproduction begins with her bid to problematize women’s reproductive work for critical theory to be truly critical. She begins her essay “What’s Critical about Critical Theory?” by recalling Marx’s 1843 definition of Critical Theory as ‘the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age’.<sup>23</sup> In operationalizing Marx’s criterion, Fraser looked for indicators of compliance or noncompliance of any thinking claiming to be a critique by posing questions that are mindful of women’s self-clarifications, and wishes of the critic’s time. Crucial inclusions of a critical theory worth its name are empirical testability, research frames, analytical categories, and explanatory models that are situated within contemporary liberation movements (such as women’s movements) and demystified from ideological-androcentric bias.<sup>24</sup>

Fraser’s examination of how these questions play out in Habermas’s critique of the Western welfare state demonstrates the power of second-order philosophical analysis in catching a cat by its own tail, so to speak, in the case of Habermas’s gendered blind spots in *Theory of Communicative Action*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Caitlín Doherty, “Topographies of Capital,” in *New Left Review*, 143 (September–October 2023), 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Nancy Fraser, “What’s Critical About Critical Theory: The Case of Habermas and Gender,” in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, ed. by Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 253–276. The work of Marx cited by Fraser is Karl Marx, “Letter to A. Ruge, September 1843,” in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), 209.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* The original text is: To my mind, no one has yet improved on Marx’s 1843 definition of Critical Theory as “the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age.’ What is so appealing about this definition is its straightforwardly political character. A critical theory, it says, frames its research in the light of the contemporary social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification. For example, if struggles contesting the subordination of women figured among the most significant of a given age, then a critical social theory for that time would seek to shed light on the character and bases of such subordination. It would employ categories and explanatory models that revealed rather than occluded relations of male dominance and female subordination. And it would demystify as ideological rival approaches that obfuscated or rationalized those relations. In this situation, then, one of the standards for assessing a critical theory, once it had been subjected to all the usual tests of empirical adequacy, would be: how well does it theorize the situation and prospects of the feminist movement? To what extent does it serve the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of contemporary women?,” 253.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

The essay is long and very detailed, and it cannot be given a fair presentation here. In line with this section's objective, we focus on Fraser's critique of the elisions of reproductive work, which in those times meant child rearing, underpaid work, and the stereotyping of women as welfare dependents. In the process, Fraser has unburied the unthematized gendered subtexts of Habermas's critique of the welfare state by showing an intrinsic link between major themes, on the one hand, and the ideology of androcentrism, on the other. To mention one of these linkages: Habermas's distinction between the family as "a socially integrated, symbolic reproduction domain" and the paid workplace as "a system-integrated material reproduction domain" obliterated household labour which was as exploited like paid work, except that it was unrecognized and unpaid.<sup>26</sup> As a result two facts about women's work in the paid sector are uninterrogated: 1) household women are automatically assigned "distinctively feminine, service-oriented and often sexualized occupations" and 2) in both public and private spheres "women are invariably subordinated to men."<sup>27</sup> Fraser's gender-sensitive unfolding of Habermas's omissions reveals among others that: 1) male dominance, like all ideologies, is not accidental, but rather intrinsic to classical capitalism. Exploitative practices based on gendered roles are not natural kinds, and like other exploitative practices, they are ideological; 2) critical theories have treated gender as only incidental to politics and political economy, and thus failed to topicalize the way "gender norms structure paid work, state administration and political participation"<sup>28</sup>; and 3) concepts like "worker, consumer, and wage are not strictly economic concepts. Rather, they have an implicit gender subtext and thus are 'gender-economic' concepts."<sup>29</sup> Similarly, "the concept of citizenship is not strictly a political concept; it has an implicit gender subtext and so, rather, is a 'gender-political' concept."<sup>30</sup> These Fraserian hybrid concepts highlight "the need for a critical-theoretical categorial framework in which gender, politics, and political economy are internally integrated."<sup>31</sup>

### *Social Reproduction and the Crisis of Care under Financialized Capitalism*

In her 2016 essay "Contradictions of Capital and Care," Fraser reaffirms her dismal prognosis that at the core of the materialist-economic

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

## 52 EXPANDING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

analysis is the economic bias that has neglected to theorize the social.<sup>32</sup> The worsening impact of the economic system on our general way of life has become more ubiquitous and pervasive under the third and latest stage of capitalist development: the global financial economy or financialized capitalism, the first stage was the “liberal competitive capitalism” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the second was the “state-managed capitalism” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> Globalized financial capitalism has created a new class: the most precarious class of migrant workers and subclass of migrant women, due to 1) the relocation of manufacturing to low-wage regions, creating local migrancy at the national and regional levels; 2) the recruitment of women into the paid workforce both in the North and in the South creating two-breadwinner households, and 3) the subsequent need for migrant domestic labor. Under these circumstances, the built-in source of instability in all regimes of capitalism, which is the dependency of profits on the “very same processes of social reproduction whose value they disavow,” is by far the worst.<sup>34</sup> Fraser claims, this “social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism” lies at the root of the so-called crisis of care.<sup>35</sup> It must be noted that while Fraser employs the term “care” in crisis of care, she is quick to remind her readers that this appellation is not her coinage. She is dismissive of the ways in which “care” has been sentimentalized and romanticized, thus occluding the pernicious implications of the term, and making it inept to capture the political, cultural economy of reproductive work.

In her latest book, *Cannibal Capitalism*, Fraser further extends her critical feminist theorizing to include capitalist predation of nature.<sup>36</sup> Her employment of “cannibal” is a powerful metaphor of how capitalism eats its own flesh, in the way productive work survives on the flesh of reproductive labour. This idea is demonstrated globally, traversing differently situated societies, classes, genders, races, including nature. A concrete case of cannibalism is how third world countries cope with debts, structural adjustments, and balancing of dollar reserves, through the exportation of migrant women, which results in care deficiency at the home front. In an interview a few months ago, Fraser was asked if the term “cannibalism”

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<sup>32</sup> See Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” in *New Left Review*, 100 (July–August 2016), 99–117.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 101–102. Note that Fraser has consistently traced the historical mutations of capitalism to three stages in other writings, as part of her project of historicizing capitalism, see Fraser “Can Society Be Commodities All the Way down?,” *Cannibal Capitalism*, and *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Can Society Be Commodities All the Way down? Post-Polanyian Reflections on Capitalist Crisis,” in *Economy and Society*, 43 (2014), 541–558.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism: How Our System is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet—and What We Can Do About It* (London: Verso Books, 2022).

might not evoke racist imageries of “primitive peoples” eating human flesh, and she responds that the term rather refracts on the very civilization that proliferated it, in the sense that White, colonialist capitalism devours care work, the working class, social services, political energies, and natural resources.<sup>37</sup>

In a 2025 lecture, Fraser broadens her theory of reproductive work by identifying three types of labour that have been commodified as reserve labour force for capitalism’s historical evolutions from feudal to industrial and now to the global economy of care. In the lecture, Fraser explores the fusion of class, race, and gender under what might be a unified theory of social reproduction. Her conceptual schema illuminates three types of reproductive labour that are mutually constitutive and imbricated unto each other: exploited, expropriated, and domesticated.<sup>38</sup> Exploited labour consists of cheap labour of wage-earners created by capital accumulation; expropriated labour is work extracted from the colonized races who in some cases are transported to places as slaves; and domesticated work is not so much “tamed” but refers rather to the consignment of women in the home of unpaid and submissive work. Here demonstrated once again is Fraser’s expansive project implicating more axes of exploitation. On top of class are race and gender which are not only analytically distinct but are also in the real world co-constitutive and co-imbricated unto each other.

### *A Grand Theory of Critique Grandier than Marx’s*

In 2018, Fraser conversed with a fellow critical theorist Rahel Jaeggi, where she admitted to having spent decades on her project of constructing a large-scale social theory of capitalism suitable for the times.<sup>39</sup> Jaeggi pointed out how this ambitious task, long forgotten by most forms of social criticism, would be a daunting task, considering the much larger historical processes, systemic conflicts, deep-seated contradictions, and crises than in Marx’s time. Fraser responded that, commensurate to this challenge, one would need to use a multi-perspectival framework no longer confined to economic and financial but also ecological, political, and social. Critique has to accommodate now those that it has intentionally, or unintentionally excluded, by integrating insights from feminism, ecology, and

<sup>37</sup> See “Workers Are Cannibalized by the Capitalist Class: Nancy Fraser | UpFront,” YouTube video, 24:58, posted by @AlJazeeraEnglish (14 February 2025), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLoRoWrYo4E>>.

<sup>38</sup> See “Nancy Fraser - Three Faces of Labor: Uncovering the Hidden Ties Between Gender, Race, and Class,” YouTube video, 45:00, posted by @WesternUniversity (15 February 2025), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJcNdZJpB6w>>.

<sup>39</sup> See Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, ed. by Brian Milstein (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

postcolonialism, with the proviso that their respective blind spots are not recuperated. Fraser insisted that the unifying analytic of these engagements has to be “crisis,” tantamount to the construction of a grand crisis critique. However, Fraser warned that social criticism has distanced itself from crisis critique due to its “inherently mechanistic, deterministic, teleological, functionalistic—you name it” tendencies.<sup>40</sup> But since at no time in history had we lived worse, Fraser declared, “we are living in the throes of an epochal crisis of capitalism,” and we have therefore “an urgent need to reconstruct crisis theorizing today.”<sup>41</sup>

It is worth noting that the most powerful and latest addition to Fraser’s expansion of the capitalism–socialism pair is her adoption of “ecological crisis critique.” Fraser’s adoption of the concept of ecological crisis into her crisis critique is deemed paradigmatic for it pays attention to another dimension neglected by Marx, despite the massive extraction of natural resources during his time. On the practical side, Fraser’s inclusion of the environment among the exploited categories puts an objective rein upon human capitalist extraction, treating nature as inexhaustible and malleable resource.

Summing up, Fraser’s grand theory of social reproduction is a trenchant reminder that critical-emancipatory projects, while taking off from particularly situated experiences of social pathologies, are obligated to be thoroughgoing in their critical analyses and all-inclusive in their vision. Awareness of the intersection and co-imbrication of social categories and experience, such as class, gender, and race, with environmental degradation can ensure thorough analysis. Likewise, being sensitive that one’s emancipatory vision jives—not conflicts—with that of others can ensure inclusivity.

## Part 2: Fiona Robinson’s Criticalization of Care

First-generation care ethicists in the 1960s to 1970s, like Sara Ruddick among them, engaged in the laborious task of interrogating the moral, ontological, and epistemological presuppositions of mainstream ethical systems, which belittled women as moral subjects and excluded women’s values from the desiderata of what is moral. Care ethics is better appreciated when situated under radical feminism, which like socialist feminism, was one form of second-wave feminism. It can be recalled, a singular achievement of second-wave feminists was the identification of the linchpin of women’s oppression, which was at the same time posited as the liberating concept,

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<sup>40</sup> Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

provided that the reigning anti-women mentalities and practices be radically transformed. For radical feminists, women's oppression was founded on their alleged biological or socially constructed identification with nature. The task at hand was to reverse the hierarchical dualism guided by male-centric or patriarchal ideology that privileged culture over nature, reason over the senses, man over woman. To this end, Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) affirmed there were natural differences between man and woman.<sup>42</sup> Thus while woman is one with nature, she hears the voice of nature, man sets himself apart from nature, he cannot hear woman speak, he is incapable of any dialogue.<sup>43</sup> It thus made sense, that the reclamation of woman's nature whether socially constructed or real, became the precondition and substantive grounding for women's liberation.

Sara Ruddick's valorization of caring practices arising from and honed by mothering ensued from the woman's nature thrust of radical feminism in that period. Providing philosophical justifications for her stance, Ruddick argued that mothering was not merely a biological but as well a cognitive task, having its own logic, epistemology, and ethics.<sup>44</sup> The ramifications of Ruddick's prescient reflections on mothering were based on relational ontology, challenging the predominant view of persons as rational and self-maximizing individuals as well as on a type of moral epistemology known as "ethical naturalism" or the view that what ought to be (moral valuing of care) is based on what is (caring nature of mothers). In philosophy, the favoured perspective in moral epistemology has been termed "ethical non-naturalism," or the view that moral judgements are functions of the will and not dictated by the state of things.<sup>45</sup>

### *Reconceptualizing Care for a Critical Theory of Care*

Feminist theorizing of women's distinctive capacity and socially constructed predisposition to care has been critiqued and improved upon by what may be called "second-generation care ethicists" (a term employed by Fiona Robinson) to the extent that care ethics has now been shorn of its exaggerated valorization of the feminine, graduating into a feminist analysis. Robinson's reconceptualization of care and those of other care ethicists are the preconditions of her project, i.e., a critical theory of care, specifically her incorporation of care in international labour rights. This project can be done by seriously "observing certain minimum labor standards in the production

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<sup>42</sup> Note at the same time the universalization in the singular nouns and pronouns.

<sup>43</sup> Excerpts from Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, 1978, in Maggie Humm, ed., *Feminisms: A Reader* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 76.

<sup>44</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

of goods and services imported to northern countries” as well as “the ILO’s ‘core’ standards of rights—the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor and the elimination of discrimination at work.”<sup>46</sup>

Care ethics has evolved from a norm developed from mothering practices, expanding to moral problems in the personal, social, political, and global realms.<sup>47</sup> With Rianne Mahon, Robinson identifies transformations in the care concept and their implications.<sup>48</sup> First, care has been dissociated from its narrow application to the experience of White privileged women to persons of different genders, class, and race. Second, care has been rid of its connotations exclusive to personal, intimate, and face-to-face relationships that ideally happen in private spaces. As a result, care has been extended to public spaces such as hospitals and offices, care work in the economy, and in concrete activities of real people in the context of webs of social relations. Third, the concept of care has been politicized in ways that would distance caring practices from its sentimentalized and romanticized origins. Fourth, the concept and activity of care was raised to the level of the community, national, and global or transnational level so that action at these levels will be saturated with the value and politics of care. Elevating the relevance of care in the global arena, women served as frontliners of this feminized contract-based transnational migration.<sup>49</sup> And as the traditional notion of caring sprouted from a normative view that it is better attuned to the affectionate and loving personality traits of women,<sup>50</sup> this, in turn, gave birth to a commodified nature of care, which illustrates a dangerous liaison between global capitalism and feminism. This is because attributing care work to a feminine practice will devalue its status on the global scale of the economy.

### *Integrating Care with Social Reproduction*

Robinson envisioned her critical theory of care as a productive integration of research on care and social reproduction. Care ethics, with its emphasis on relational ontology, is entrenched in the interactive aspects of

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<sup>46</sup> Fiona Robinson, “Beyond Labour Rights: The Ethics of Care and Women’s Work in the Global Economy,” in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 8 (2006), 329.

<sup>47</sup> Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9–12.

<sup>48</sup> See Rianne Mahon and Fiona Robinson, “Introduction,” in *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*, ed. by Rianne Mahon and Fiona Robinson (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> See Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Bittiandra Chand Somaiah, Theodora Lam, and Kristel F. Acedera, “Doing Family in ‘Times of Migration’: Care Temporalities and Gender Politics in Southeast Asia,” in *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 110 (2020).

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, “Beyond Labour Rights,” 322.

human labour, which is typically a major concern in feminist philosophy.<sup>51</sup> This project is necessary so that care ethics can be productively integrated with international relations and international labour rights as well as become more inclusive of nuanced models and more effective in analysing complex interactions between care and inequalities. As a normative framework, the work–care perspective analyses the collective responsibility and mutual dependence of persons living in networks of care; thus, it is gender-responsive as it highlights existing gender imbalances with respect to the giving and receiving of care.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the care–reproductive work partnership involves a careful analysis of actual policy developments in particular national contexts. Most importantly, the collaboration may result in innovative theorizations of gender and race relations, global justice and neocolonialism, and care and masculinities as they relate to the development of a global ethics and social politics of care.<sup>53</sup>

Mahon and Robinson have identified Virginia Held, among others, as her inspiration in theorizing care, recalling that, for Held, the term “care” has two related meanings. The first refers to a set of activities and form of labour focused on social reproduction, including child care, elder care, care for the sick, and those with disabilities as well as other forms of household and domestic labour. The second involves the understanding of care as the basis for a system of ethics. Robinson adopted Held’s views that the central theme of care ethics is “the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of particular others for whom we take responsibility.”<sup>54</sup>

### *Theorizing the Global Care Crisis*

The global shortfall in care provision is rooted in the gendered framing of caregiving, which obscures its true economic significance. Caregiving, in essence, has long been associated with femininity; it is typically regarded not as labour but as a natural instinct of women—freely extended out of affection for family and loved ones. Even as demand for care labour advances within globalized contexts, it remains constrained by this gendered bias, persistently undervalued and relegated to the domain of “unproductive” work despite its essential role in sustaining both social and economic systems. Some lawmakers understand the contributions of stay-at-home wives in maintaining the household running smoothly. In the

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<sup>51</sup> Christina Clark-Kazak, “‘Why Care Now’ in Forced Migration Research? Imagining a Radical Feminist Ethics of Care,” in *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 22 (2023), 1152.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Mahon and Robinson, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

## 58 EXPANDING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Philippines, House Bill No. 668 intends to provide a modest ₱2,000 allowance to stay-at-home mothers who are living below the poverty threshold. This is a way of giving recognition to their contribution in maintaining the family's stability and productivity. However, despite the small financial support it offered, the proposal ultimately failed to become law.<sup>55</sup> The proposed bill took an inspiration from article 142 of the Civil Code of the Philippines, which states:

conjugal partnership of gains, the husband and wife place in a common fund the fruits of their separate property and the income from their work or industry, and divide equally, upon the dissolution of the marriage or of the partnership, the net gains or benefits obtained indiscriminately by either spouse during the marriage.

This protection of the wife from the civil code under conjugal partnership seems to positively count the housekeeping duties of wives as a significant contribution, giving wives the right to obtain merit in the partnership. However, this remains to be contested in actual situations when a dissolution of marriage is undertaken. So long as there is no specified law concretizing the reconceptualized meaning of housework as a form of special labour that contributes to family stability and social harmony,<sup>56</sup> there remains a possibility for the law to be gender-biased in solving marital disputes involving the division of conjugal properties.

In seeking to address deeply embedded gendered inequities in caregiving, Robinson advocates for a normative framework grounded in a feminist ethics of care. This framework offers a more nuanced and context-sensitive analysis of how caregiving responsibilities are disproportionately allocated along gender lines, while providing a moral and policy-oriented basis to redress these imbalances.<sup>57</sup> This emphasis on the need to find an adequate framework or theory for analysing care work results from a failure to take into account the relational aspects of this type of labour. Thus, in a book chapter, Robinson problematizes “what kind of moral perspective is required in order to make sense of the ethical dilemmas that arise in a situation in which millions of women from income-poor, peripheral states

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<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Pabico Lalu, “Bill Eyes to Give Stay-at-Home Moms P2K Monthly Subsidy,” in *INQUIRER.net* (3 August 2022), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1639976/bill-eyes-to-give-stay-at-home-moms-p2k-monthly-subsidy>>.

<sup>56</sup> See Miao Chungang, “A Study on the Reasonableness of Housework Compensation from a Comparative Law Perspective,” in *Journal of Global Research in Education and Social Science*, 18 (August 2024).

<sup>57</sup> Robinson, “Beyond Labour Rights,” 321–322.

migrate to more affluent countries to do the work that is ‘associated with a wife’s traditional role—child care, homemaking and sex’.<sup>58</sup> Robinson links this situation to social and demographic transformations in the nature, extent, and location of paid work, notably the increase in women’s labour force participation.<sup>59</sup>

### *Beyond Labour Rights*

One might contend that the challenges confronting care workers globally constitute a significant human rights concern. Robinson critically assesses the shortcomings of dominant human rights scholarship in adequately representing the emotionally grounded dimensions of labour, thus underscoring the need to integrate care as a central analytical and normative consideration. She argues that care ethics becomes the foremost consideration in the labour rights of women working in the care economy.<sup>60</sup> She believes that the problematic framework of the *rights-based approach* is evident in its overreliance on a liberal-individualistic moral ontology incapable of analysing the crucial normative dynamics of relational power involving the real needs of the working class. In addition, the rights-based approach is gender-biased in its disregard of the nature and context of the work being performed.<sup>61</sup> A *care-based approach*, on the contrary, offers a clearer picture of the actual and relational aspects of care work. The inadequacy and gender bias of rights-based ethical frameworks in law and institutions prodded Robinson to argue for a realistic assessment of the political, economic, and social conditions that will provide the conditions for workers’ rights to be realized.<sup>62</sup> The normative aspect of the care-based approach makes us recognize the reality that “free speech and adequate nourishment do not just materialize out of thin air; they are realized as a result of debate and dialogue about individual and social responsibilities in the contexts of families, communities, states, and, now, at the level of global governance.”<sup>63</sup>

It is in this regard that important steps have been taken by feminists seeking to reevaluate and redefine the concept of rights. For instance, rights may be reconceptualized to take into account gender differences and relationality by giving due fidelity to the entire network of relationships in

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<sup>58</sup> Fiona Robinson, “Care Ethics and the Transnationalization of Care: Reflections on Autonomy, Hegemonic Masculinities, and Globalization,” in *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care*, ed. by Rianne Mahon and Fiona Robinson (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 127

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> See Robinson, “Beyond Labour Rights.”

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 329–330.

which human beings are integrated. Robinson believes that “if we regard the self as relational and seek to understand the existence of rights from within the context of social relations, we are more likely to end up with a rights system that can best protect the real interests and needs of women and all persons.<sup>64</sup> Doing so will offer a potent solution to the inadequacy of a rights-based approach in conceptualizing a sound policy and legal framework to protect women’s rights in the globalized care work.

Robinson believes that “rights may be reconceptualized to take account of gender difference and relationality. Rather than allowing care to remain an ‘often unrecognized presupposition,’ it is imperative to recognize that women’s moral labor is essential to the operation of the system as a whole.”<sup>65</sup> Women—and, indeed, all individuals—are better understood as “working and caring citizens,” whose labour is diverse, dynamic, and deeply embedded in social norms, power structures, and the ongoing, reciprocal necessity of both giving and receiving care.<sup>66</sup> A feminist rights-based approach gives us a better understanding of what is required to secure the political, economic, and social conditions that make the exercise of rights possible. This will help address the needs of women as well—a good starting point from which to formulate progressive global social policy in relation to care work.<sup>67</sup>

Human beings do not really experience equality in many respects. In a similar tone, care ethics recognizes the fact that human beings are dependent and vulnerable in many aspects of their lives—these conditions are not limitations that we should overcome but natural aspects of our lives that should be acknowledged and navigated through positive human encounters.<sup>68</sup> The idea of care is centred on relations and responsibilities known to be vital in human survival. Furthermore, Robinson argues that care should be treated as a public value that must be negotiated in many ways, from the household to the international community, where it recently became an integral part of the global economy.<sup>69</sup> It is in this light that care must be understood from a feminist relational (moral) ontology, a recognition that we exist through our relations of responsibility and care for particular others.<sup>70</sup> This leads to a very different understanding, especially when it enters international or global relations.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>68</sup> Fiona Robinson, “Stop Talking and Listen: Discourse Ethics and Feminist Care Ethics in International Political Theory,” in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39 (2011), 845.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 847.

The consistent commitment of international bodies (e.g., the United Nations and National Government Organizations) and governments of host and source countries helps a lot in confronting the issue head-on. For instance, care work can be seen as a necessary economic stopgap or even a lucrative career for some workers. However, to foster respect and elevate its economic value in terms of the wage system and workers' safety, a serious professionalization of care work must happen. Feminist applications of care ethics to a political and social theory are important to expose failures, especially manifested in empirical studies that reveal great inequalities in the Global North and South relations.<sup>71</sup>

*Philosophical Labour in Exposing Underlying Ontological Presuppositions of Moral Theories*

Robinson's analysis consistently demonstrates her exercise of philosophical labour. Aside from her contributions to the conceptual clarification of care, she has unearthed philosophical presuppositions of dominant ideologies and arrangements that continue to resist care. Like her predecessors, she has offered solutions characterized by a relational ontology specific to care ethics. It starts with the assumption that "all persons exist in networks of relationships, and are fundamentally interdependent" and "a contextualized understanding of morality which arises out of relationships with particular others."<sup>72</sup> Part of this relational ontology is the recognition that all persons need care and are, at the same time, capable of caregiving. The concept of care has no space in liberal-individualist, rights-based accounts of justice; otherwise, they are bound to hide their true nature in abstract theorizing.

Robinson, who dedicated many of her works to understanding care ethics, believes that politically, we should seek solutions to problems related to the giving and receiving of care that are nonexploitative and equitable as well. And since realistically, care has been relocated from the private into the public sphere, let alone its emerging presence in the global sphere, care policies should occupy a substantive focus in political deliberations. It is worth reiterating that in Robinson's view, care ethics is not simply a normative theory but a feminist critical theory as it fundamentally challenges the obfuscation of oppression by gendered ideologies.

Making moral judgments about the nature of social encounters, whether it is within the private realm of the household or the public and global political economy, cannot be analysed vis-à-vis abstracted moral or

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<sup>71</sup> Dela Cruz, Noelle Leslie G. "When Your Country Cannot Care for Itself: A Filipino Feminist Critique of Care-based Political Theories," in *Kritike*, 14 (2020), 131.

<sup>72</sup> Robinson, "Beyond Labour Rights," 332.

## 62 EXPANDING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

rights theories. Instead, we should put an emphasis on relations of responsibility and care as the basic foundation of our understanding of social reality; it is here where moral judgment should be formed, especially in a manner of contextualizing human relations.<sup>73</sup> In line with this, it becomes imperative to reevaluate these relations, whether they are healthy and nurturing or oppressive and exploitative. And in doing so, it is doubly important to bring to the core the inequalities that human beings may suffer from, especially since the ethics of care recognizes the fact that equality is a vague, if not a value that is hardly achieved. It is in this light that we argue that Robinson offers a very realistic analysis of what is truly happening in the area of care labour in the global context. Therefore, while the ethics of care is feminist, it is politically motivated, and so it demands redress of imbalances in the role of care in societies. As a result of this activism, we are enabled to cope with diversity and plurality and are enabled to make better and informed judgments in our moral and policy-making.<sup>74</sup>

While the ethics of care cannot fully provide an adequate basis in explaining how exploitation and injustices in the care sector can be totally eradicated, it does give us a concrete focus for analysing how these injustices in the global scale exist by revealing the complex reasons why people lack adequate care, why people fail to give and receive care effectively, and why care labour remains unrecognized, exploitative, and taken advantage by many at the cost of marginalized sectors in our societies. A focus on care also helps us to recognize how socially constructed norms of race and gender are constitutive of the contemporary (unjust) global order. Foregrounding care reveals the negative effects on most of the world's population of the dominant structures and institutions of the contemporary global order, especially its hegemonic forms of masculinity.<sup>75</sup>

To sum up, Robinson's critical theory of care engenders a responsible global political economy in the area of care work. She believes that it is likewise important that policymakers from the Global North recognize that they bear some important moral responsibility for the current state of the world and that the power and riches that they enjoy in the North are dependent upon the underpaid and unpaid work done by the world's majority in the South.<sup>76</sup> A critical ethics of care, in the way Robinson elucidates it, must begin with the thin but relevant claim, as supported by much empirical work, that the notion of care is a fundamental aspect of our everyday life and an essential element of the human condition. This, in turn,

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<sup>73</sup> Fiona Robinson, "Care, Gender and Global Social Justice: Rethinking 'Ethical Globalization,'" in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 2 (2006), 15.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

will help us realize that care is important for human survival and is a necessary condition for human security and well-being.<sup>77</sup>

### **Conclusion: Engendering Research, Policy, and Transformative Practice for a Critical Theory of the Global Crisis of Care**

What we hope to have accomplished in this article is to demonstrate the utility of a task peculiar to philosophy which is conceptual clarification, accompanied by metatheoretical analysis. We looked into what we have proposed are instantiations, in fact models, of philosophical under-labouring, in ways reminiscent of John Locke's and Roy Bhaskar's conception of the unique task of critical philosophy. Selected works by two feminist philosophers, Nancy Fraser and Fiona Robinson, demonstrate furthermore, that philosophical under-labouring ought to result in policy and real-world transformations, in this paper's chosen topic, the precarious conditions of women (and men) in the current transnational care economy. But these projects, they insist, must be predicated on clarification and reconstruction of social reproduction and care, surfacing subtexts, and philosophical assumptions inimical to these projects.

Fraser's analysis and reconceptualization of social reproduction are integral to her grand critique of a viciously mutating capitalism, requiring expansion of the concept as well as the necessary expansion of socialism that is no longer a transitory phase to communism or the classless society but a more sustainable and realistic end in itself. Cognizant of categories of oppression other than class, such as race, gender, substantive cultural differences (recognition rights), and the non-human world, care crisis critique requires inter/trans disciplinary as well as intersectional research methods. Contextualizing research and interventions within a growing number of categories of "self-clarifications and wishes of the age", that in reality, co-constitute and co-imbricate each other in various ways through time, requires a theory that is broad enough, and yet attentive enough to differences in the transnational care economy. This is a tough job. Sociologists have bravely taken this challenge of balancing grand theory with local or regional variations. For instance, Elizabeth Uy Eviota's analysis of the sexual division of labor, in the Philippines from Precolonial to Colonial, and Post-Colonial Period employs the combined structuralist analytical lenses of political-economy, Marxist-socialist feminism, patriarchy, and colonialism.<sup>78</sup> Her prescient account of women's reproductive work is likewise attentive to

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<sup>77</sup> Fiona Robinson, "Global Care Ethics: Beyond Distribution, beyond Justice," in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 9 (2013), 132.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Uy Eviota, *The Political Economy of Gender: Women and the Sexual Division of Labour in the Philippines* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1992).

differential implications of region, age, family values, religion, and a host of other factors. Another Filipino sociologist that has effectively mobilized the combined powers of macro and micro analysis, in their researches and policy interventions, is Rhacel Salazar Parreñas. In her two seminal books, *Servants of Globalization*, and *The Force of Domesticity*,<sup>79</sup> social reproduction theory, transnational feminism, and intersectional theory subsume her empirical and ethnographic studies of the global care chain. Parreñas is acknowledged by peers to have coined the term international division of reproductive work, a new analytical category now deemed more relevant than the neoliberal term, international division of labor.

A viable form of the new socialism might be democratic socialism, or any form of post-capitalist or de-neoliberalized institutional frame, that will result from the choices and deliberation of the stakeholders, the 99%. In fact, for Fraser, freedom or emancipation is only the means, while parity of participation is the goal.<sup>80</sup>

Robinson's conceptual clarification of care, including the reconstruction of the concept, is necessary to prefigure her project of a critical theory, research, and policy interventions, of care. An analysis of her selected works pertinent to the global crisis of care indicates a systematic synthesis of the several transformations in the concept of care, its subsequent reconstructions, and how she integrates these with her project of socializing, criticalizing, politicizing, and internationalizing the concept. More than Fraser, Robinson explicitly describes her excavation work in terms of ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

Social reproduction reconceived connotes a deep-seated and unrelenting commitment. It is a thread that stitches all social and ecological support systems of capitalism, whatever the historical juncture it is in. On the reverse side, social reproduction connotes hope that the time is not too distant for labour to be regarded once more as humanizing and human life to be at the centre.

The concept of care no longer connotes romanticization and universalization of a specific femininity. It has been rid of its sacrificial, nurturant, submissive, and intimate connotations. The concept now includes all persons capable of receiving care and of giving care; all possible venues aside from the private sphere are now venues of caring activities. Most importantly, it has been criticalized and thus expected to meet Marx's

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<sup>79</sup> See Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity: Filipina Migrants and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>80</sup> See Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* and Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*.

benchmark of the critical, as the self-clarifications of the struggles and wishes of the age.

As a result, Robinson is very critical of the effects of bringing care from the private realm into the public realm. Similar to Fraser, she argues that care extends beyond being merely an economic concern, as it is fundamentally a social, feminist, gender, race, and environmental issue. Around the world, the majority of care work is performed by women, and much of this work is unremunerated. Moreover, as women from lower-income countries in the global South migrate to wealthier nations in the global North, a “care deficit” phenomenon emerges, especially as more women globally enter the paid workforce. This situation is troubling because it reveals unequal power relations and exploitation within the economic system, where richer countries maintain stable household dynamics by relying on the social reproduction of care labor. Yet, care work remains undervalued and underpaid in most areas of the world. Care labour entering the global economy requires international policy coordination among countries that are part of the care-chain flow. Fiona Robinson’s central concern is that as care moves into the public realm and becomes part of the formal economy, it risks becoming commodified and exploitative. To address this, international policies on care labour must promote equitable working conditions, strengthen labour protections for migrant care workers, and establish ethical recruitment agreements between countries. More broadly, responding to the global care crisis requires comprehensive and coordinated policy approaches that recognize care as an essential component of the economy, rather than a feminized and marginalized form of labor.

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## Border Crossing as a Form of Resistance

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*Franz Giuseppe F. Cortez*

**Abstract:** In this paper, I will argue that border crossing can be a form of resistance by conscientious citizens in a democratic society. I will frame the right to leave one's country on the philosophical musings of John Locke regarding the state of nature and the natural rights of the citizens. To balance the classical liberalist disposition of his thoughts, I will appropriate Stanley Aronowitz's and Henry Giroux's distinction between oppositional behavior and resistance. Hopefully, what emerges is a border crosser who is not only concerned with their personal rights, security, and pursuit of happiness but also a critical citizen who resists undemocratic social arrangements, remains rooted in their original community, and retains their hope for meaningful societal changes.

**Keywords:** Aronowitz, Giroux, Locke, border crossing

Migratory birds cutting across the sky in perfect formations are a fascinating sight to behold. The website of *World Migratory Bird Day* describes avian migration as a natural wonder. "Migratory birds fly hundreds and thousands of kilometres to find the best ecological conditions and habitats for feeding, breeding, and raising their young. When conditions at breeding sites become unfavourable, it is time to fly to regions where conditions are better."<sup>1</sup> As to the reasons why they travel, Priyanka Runwal, an Indian science journalist, reports in *National Geographic* that "[f]inding food is generally believed to be the main driver. Additional motivations could include escaping from inclement weather and reducing exposure to predators or parasites, especially during breeding season."<sup>2</sup> Birds migrate as an instinctive act of survival. But this is not a guarantee of safety and subsistence. Migration is a precarious expedition with unending threats

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<sup>1</sup> "Why Migratory Birds," World Migratory Bird Day, <<https://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org/migratory#:~:text=Migratory%20birds%20fly%20hundreds%20and,regions%20where%20conditions%20are%20better>>.

<sup>2</sup> Priyanka Runwal, "Bird Migration Is One of Nature's Great Wonders. Here's How They Do It," in *National Geographic* (5 May 2021), <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/bird-migration-one-of-natures-wonders-heres-how-they-do-it>>.

along the way and at the destination. “Migration is a perilous journey and involves a wide range of threats, often caused by human activities. And as diverse as people and their habits in different countries are, so are the threats the birds face. As migratory birds depend on a range of sites along their distribution area, the loss of wintering and stopover sites could have a dramatic impact on the birds’ chances of survival.”<sup>3</sup>

This paper is not about the flight of birds. Rather, it reflects on the deeper meaning of border crossing as a human act. Avian migration is a phenomenon that may prompt us to think about human beings as migrants and border crossers. Just like birds travelling long distances to survive and prolong their species, humans may also cross borders in search of more hospitable conditions for nourishment and flourishing. However, unlike birds that simply follow the imperative of the natural world’s rhythms and necessities, human migration may not simply be an escape for biological survival but a conscious reclaiming of agency and the right to imagine a different life.

In this paper, I will argue that border crossing can be a form of resistance by conscientious citizens in a democratic society. I will frame the right to leave one’s country on the philosophical musings of John Locke regarding the state of nature and the natural rights of the citizens. To balance the classical liberalist disposition of his thoughts, I will appropriate Stanley Aronowitz’s and Henry Giroux’s distinction between oppositional behavior and resistance. Hopefully, what emerges is a border crosser who is not only concerned with their personal rights, security, and pursuit of happiness but also a critical citizen who resists undemocratic social arrangements, remains rooted in their original community, and retains their hope for meaningful societal changes.

### What Is Border Crossing?

On the website of the *European Commission*, border crossing is formally defined as “the physical act of crossing a border either at a border crossing point or another point along the border.” The context of the Commission’s definition is a situation of crossing the border between two independent, adjacent states. But “[i]n a literal sense, border crossing relates to movement across the geographical and physical borders that define our world.”<sup>4</sup> Taken at its face value, its definition contemplates a general happening when a person crosses any boundary, may it be between two

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<sup>3</sup> “Why Migratory Birds,” World Migratory Bird Day.

<sup>4</sup> Louise Townsin, “Border Crossing,” in *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, 109 (2024), <<https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/kc109-border-crossing.pdf>>.

barangays, two municipalities, two cities, two provinces, two regions, two countries, or even two continents. In this paper, I use the term to refer to the instance when a person leaves their home country for another country, whether adjacent to their country or not. Furthermore, I use border crossing as a generic term to refer to emigration, immigration, expatriation, voluntary exile, and the flight of refugees. It may be noted that there are historical and political issues behind these English lexicons. For example, Mawuna Koutonin, the editor of *SiliconAfrica.com*, wrote a brief article for *The Guardian*, validly raising the politics behind the conventional labelling of Western white border crossers as expatriates and Blacks, Arabs, and Asians as immigrants.<sup>5</sup> This is an interesting matter, but we can reserve this topic for another day.

Perhaps a few examples may further contextualize how we should understand border crossing in this paper. A young Filipina by the name of Pauline Araki wrote an interesting article for the Youngblood column of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, expressing the mainly biological-survival reason why many Filipinos go abroad. She says that “[r]unning away from the *Perlas ng Silanganan* has become inevitable. We really can’t blame these people, can we? Philippines, you left us no choice. Your people need to survive. Your people need to send their children to school, and feed their families, and give them the lives they deserve – and I’m sorry, but your pesos can’t do that for them.”<sup>6</sup> In 2016, it was reported by *The Guardian* that when Donald Trump was elected as president of the United States, there was an observable increase in online searches like “move to Canada” and “immigrate to Canada,” indicating how some Americans were responding to the election result. This urged various American media outlets to publish articles advising how to relocate to Canada.<sup>7</sup> Or consider a similar sentiment of Filipino voters disillusioned with Philippine electoral processes when Leni Robredo lost to President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos, Jr. in the May 2022 presidential elections. Through social media, they expressed their desire to leave the country. The Filipino political analyst and legal luminary, Antonio La Viña, agreed but encouraged them to return.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Mawuna Remarque Koutonin, “Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?,” in *The Guardian* (13 March 2015), <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/13/white-people-expats-immigrants-migration>>.

<sup>6</sup> Pauline Araki, “This Is Why We Leave You,” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (29 November 2016), <<https://opinion.inquirer.net/99603/this-is-why-we-leave-you>>.

<sup>7</sup> Ashifa Kassam, “‘Move to Canada’ threats return – but actually emigrating there is difficult,” in *The Guardian* (9 November 2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/09/move-to-canada-trump-election-immigration>>.

<sup>8</sup> Jaehwa Bernardo, “Planning to Migrate Post-elections? ‘Go Out and Come back,’ Analyst Says,” in *ABS-CBN News* (10 May 2022), <<https://www.abs-cbn.com/spotlight/05/10/22/analyst-to-young-people-ok-to-leave-ph-but-come-back>>.

## 72 BORDER CROSSING

The parallel responses of many Americans expressing a desire to leave the United States following Donald Trump's victory, and of Filipinos contemplating migration after Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s electoral win, prompted me to reflect more deeply on the meaning of border crossing – not merely as a mode of biological survival, but as a political act arising from disillusionment and the perpetual yearning for freedom. Border crossing is reflective of the deeper questions of agency, resistance, and the longing of rational individuals for a more livable political community.

As a final point in this section, it must also be noted that I do not intend to engage with the established field of migration studies across disciplines such as sociology, economics, international law, and policy studies. I am more concerned with the initial act of leaving as a withdrawal of consent, an act of resistance, and an exercise of autonomy and agency. This narrower sense of border crossing is not meant to redescribe migration as a legitimate field of inquiry, but an attempt to contribute in the critical investigation of various forms of resistance by focusing on the legitimacy of exit as a deliberate political act.

### **A Lockean Basis of the Right to Border Crossing**

At the outset, let it be said that the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) did not explicitly mention and discuss a specific right of an individual to leave their country. However, I argue that this right can be logically deduced from his foundational account of human beings' natural rights and their consent to establish a political society.

In Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, he says: "The great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property. To which, in the state of nature, there are many things wanting."<sup>9</sup> By property, he means everything that is proper to humans. So, Locke does not refer only to material possessions such as land, house, animals, and money. Property also includes life and liberty.<sup>10</sup> As regards the state of nature, Locke conjectures an original condition without a civil authority when all humans are completely free and equal. By freedom, he means that in the state of nature, every person is free to determine their actions and regulate their possessions and persons according to their own volition, but within the limits

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<sup>9</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), §124 and 155.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, §123, 155. See also John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 218.

of the law of nature. And by equality, he thinks that in the natural condition, no one has more power or authority over another.<sup>11</sup>

But Locke is quick to point out that even without a civil society with its laws and government, this natural condition is not a free-for-all, anarchic world. As he says, “it is not a state of license”<sup>12</sup> because “[t]he state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone ....”<sup>13</sup> This natural law, according to him, is reason itself commanding everyone “that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions ....”<sup>14</sup>

Granted that there is natural law in the state of nature, Locke points out that it still lacks organized systems to enforce justice successfully, administer judgment impartially, and protect property effectively. Thus, even if there is no utter chaos in the natural condition, it is characterized by several inconveniences that may lead to constant uncertainty of life and persistent insecurity of living.<sup>15</sup> First, it is inconvenient because there are no established and settled laws that would serve as the basis of right and wrong, leading to probable biased interpretations and uninformed judgment. Second, the state of nature is inconvenient because there are no impartial judges to settle disagreements, leaving judgments to everyone, who may be governed by their emotions or be negligent and indifferent to true justice. Third, it is inconvenient because there is often no reliable authority to support and execute the right decisions, so offenders may violently defy punishment, making justice dangerous or even fatal for those who try to uphold it.<sup>16</sup>

Given the insecurity and inconveniences of the state of nature, people choose to enter political society, consent to relinquish their basic freedom and equality in the natural condition and agree to be governed by civil laws and civil authorities. Reasonable individuals choose to negotiate and concede some of the rights enjoyed in the state of nature so that, in a political society governed by civil laws that they voluntarily impose upon themselves, they will continually enjoy and ensure their rights to life, liberty, and possessions. The natural right of executing the law of nature and punishing the offenders of that law is relinquished to secure fundamental freedoms and rights under a more stable political society. Individuals consent to “unfreedoms” to gain

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<sup>11</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §4, 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, §6, 102.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> “But variety in manner and method of the enforcement of justice inevitably causes confusion and uncertainty in life, and there is need of a known and certain rule in accordance with which the rights of individuals are to be protected and maintained. It is to secure such a rule that civil society is instituted.” Wm. A. Dunning, “The Political Philosophy of John Locke,” in *Political Science Quarterly*, 20:2 (June 1905), 232.

<sup>16</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §§124–126, 55.

more protection of their property (life, liberties, possessions) inside a more secure, safe, and stable civil society with laws and government. As Locke says: “The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it.”<sup>17</sup>

Now, what if the government does not fulfill its end of the bargain? What if it violates the trust conferred upon it by the people? What if the rulers are corrupt, undermining the rule of law and perpetrating a culture of impunity? What if the systems that are supposed to protect the people’s property (life, liberty, possessions) do not function to advance the overall public interest but serve only the few who are in power? What if the people start to feel helpless and hopeless in a government that belittles their rights, makes a mockery of their freedoms, and puts to waste their efforts, contributions, talents, and skills? What if they no longer consent to this presumed authority? What if the government is, in Lockean language, in a state of war with the members? Locke thinks that at a certain point, people would sense if their leaders consistently and constantly undermine the law and public trust. And when this happens, they will recognize the danger and prepare to resist.<sup>18</sup> In various instances in the *Second Treatise*, Locke hints at different forms of resistance, the most obvious of which is the use of force. Less obvious are what I would call, following the nomenclature of the German economist Albert Otto Hirschman, voice and exit.<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the use of force, Locke allows for the people’s right to violent revolution against a tyrannical authority. For him, tyranny happens when a ruler exercises power for their own selfish interests instead of advancing the welfare and protection of the people and their property.<sup>20</sup> Because governmental authority is a public trust conferred by the people to preserve their property, they always retain the supreme authority to suppress or supplant a perverted legislature that breaches that trust, since no one can legitimately relinquish their fundamental right to self-preservation and liberty.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Locke contends that if the executive branch abuses its authority by hindering the legislative branch from fulfilling the latter’s function, the executive declares a state of war against the people. In such a situation, the people may use force to restore a legitimate government and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, §95, 141–142.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, §210, 192–193.

<sup>19</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, “Exit, Voice, and the State,” in *World Politics*, 31:1 (October 1978).

<sup>20</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §§199, 200, and 188.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, §149, 166.

ensure their safety.<sup>22</sup> In another instance, Locke hints at the legitimacy of resistance when oppression becomes systematic, pervasive, and unbearable so that the oppressive condition endangers the people's lives, liberties, or even religious freedom.<sup>23</sup> Just like any common criminal whose unlawful act may be resisted, those who are in authority who exceed in their exercise of power must also be opposed because even kings and highest authorities are limited by law. In fact, their abuse is worse than that of the common criminal because they are supposed to know the law, have more material possessions, and hold greater trust from the people.<sup>24</sup>

Granted that the people have the right to reclaim their power, even by means of force, from an abusive government, Locke acknowledges its concomitant inconveniences and harm so that people would rather endure oppression and injustices until such time that they can no longer tolerate their sufferings.<sup>25</sup> Hence, he is also quick to point out that the people's right to use force against their government is a last resort when all other nonviolent means have been exhausted.<sup>26</sup> In the words of Ian Shapiro, explaining Locke's position, "not every illegal act of the government leaders justifies resistance or rebellion."<sup>27</sup> And as Ruth Grant rightly adds, "Locke needs to assure his readers that revolutions are justified only rarely, and not in response to every government that falls short of perfect justice."<sup>28</sup> And this is rightly so, because if every grievance of an individual were met by resistance to the authority, Locke says it "will unhinge and overturn all politics, and, instead of government and order, leave nothing but anarchy and confusion."<sup>29</sup>

Short of a forceful and frequently fatal revolution that leads to the dissolution of the government or society, Locke hints at other, less extreme forms of resistance in confronting government authority that exceeds their power, betrays public trust, and breaks the fundamental contract with the people. The people can also exercise the power of their voice to effect meaningful changes. Premised on the principle of popular sovereignty (*salus populi suprema lex*), he recognizes the supreme authority of the people "to remove or alter the legislative"<sup>30</sup> and, at their pleasure, change and displace

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, §155, 168–169.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, §§209–210, 225, and 229, in 192–193, 199, and 201.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, §202, 189–190.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, §§225 and 230 in 199 and 201.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, §230, 201.

<sup>27</sup> Ian Shapiro, "John Locke's Democratic Theory," in Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 325.

<sup>28</sup> Ruth W. Grant, "John Locke on Women and the Family," in Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 298.

<sup>29</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §203, 190.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, §149, 166.

## 76 BORDER CROSSING

the executive.<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, he does not contemplate here periodic democratic elections as we understand them today,<sup>32</sup> but he approves of electoral processes for choosing representatives serving for a limited time,<sup>33</sup> thus giving voice and power to the people by exercising their right to replace or change their representatives through non-violent means.<sup>34</sup> Locke also says that this power to peacefully replace corrupt rulers is the best fence against rebellion because it deters rulers from turning into tyrants and makes violent revolution less likely.<sup>35</sup>

Can the people's voice also be expressed and heard through peaceful protests and demonstrations? Again, Locke's 17<sup>th</sup> century vocabulary does not explicitly include these specific terms or modern practices of peaceful resistance. However, considering his belief that violent revolution is a last resort, it is not far-fetched that he would prefer alternative means of voicing the people's discontent, lack of consent, and loss of trust in a government that violates their personal and property rights. In an essay on Locke's views on taxation and suffrage, Martin Hughes says:

[t]he belief that government can degenerate into mere unjust violence is a belief which matters not only when we ask how to react in moments of crisis but also when we attempt to design the regular and constitutional political order: it is absurd to give people the right to resist violently when evils have been carried to extremes and yet to deny them access to constitutional politics, which they would naturally use to prevent any government from going to those extremes where violent resistance is needed.<sup>36</sup>

Besides, the natural rights of the people were not totally relinquished when they agreed to enter civil society. "But the rights surrendered to the government were only those rights which could be exercised better collectively for the benefit of society. All other rights were retained by the

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, §152, 167.

<sup>32</sup> For attempts to relate Locke's understanding of suffrage with the current practices of democratic elections, see the ff: James A. Gardner. "Consent, Legitimacy, and Elections: Implementing Popular Sovereignty Under the Lockean Constitution," in *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, 52:189 (1990).

<sup>33</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §154, 168.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, §240, 208.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, §226, 199-200.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Hughes, "Locke on Taxation and Suffrage," in *History of Political Thought*, 11:3 (Autumn 1990), 434.

individual.”<sup>37</sup> This includes their fundamental liberties. Therefore, the rights that we call now freedom of assembly and expression are also consistent with Locke’s insistence on the right of the people to resist an unjust and oppressive government.

If force and voice are alternatives for people who were betrayed by their rulers, what about exit? Can they withdraw their consent to the government through emigration, or what I call in this article as border crossing? I argue that Locke allows for this option as well. Exit is a demonstration of one’s fundamental freedom, a natural right in the state of nature that Locke consistently describes and defends. It may be recalled that by freedom in the state of nature, he pertains to every individual’s power “to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature; without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man.”<sup>38</sup> According to Daniel Layman, Locke’s notion of freedom is commonly interpreted as when “a person enjoys social freedom to the extent that no one interferes with her capacity to enjoy her rights in accordance with her own choices.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, leaving society is an exercise of autonomy that Locke holds sacred. It is an act of reclaiming one’s natural liberty by going out of the boundaries of a society that no longer honors the original agreement.

Another way of explaining the legitimacy of border crossing from a Lockean perspective is through the related doctrine of consent. In an oft-cited passage, Locke says:

Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power of another, without his consent. The only way whereby anyone divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community, for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Robin Handley, “Public Order, Petitioning and Freedom of Assembly,” in *The Journal of Legal History*, 7:2 (1986), 123, <<https://www.doi.org/10.1080/01440368608530861>>.

<sup>38</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §4, 101.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel M. Layman, “Two Concepts of Consent in Locke’s Political Theory,” in *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics*, XVIII:2 (2016), 114.

<sup>40</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §95, 141–142.

Consent is grounded on everyone's natural freedom, equality, and sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> It is one's conscious, deliberate, and willful choice to agree with other individuals to enter the civil society with its limitations, laws, and leaders for the sake of the protection of property, the security of person, and the enjoyment of living. A. John Simmons explains Lockean consent doctrine by saying that "no man is obligated to support or comply with any political power unless he has personally consented to its authority over him."<sup>42</sup> Put another way, a government legitimately governs only when the governed consents to be governed. From here, reason dictates that when a particular society generally endangers one's property (life, liberty, possessions), engenders various insecurities, and makes one's life a living hell, then the individual can withdraw their consent, leave that society, form another one, or enter another community that embodies their original ideals.

To be clear, Locke does not approve that an individual will simply leave every time they have a disagreement with laws, policies, and decisions of the rulers. According to Locke, when one consents to the political society, they also consent to the rule of the will of the majority because it assures the possibility of corporate action<sup>43</sup> and does not render the original compact empty and pointless.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, freedom is not negated by yielding to the will of the majority. In fact, it is this concession between the minority and the majority that legitimizes politics and makes collective living possible. And it is not an unquestioning conformity but a form of reasonable compromise to assure the protection of property and the security of persons.

Equally important is his often-discussed distinction between express consent and tacit consent to membership in any society. Express consent may happen when individuals explicitly participate in the formation of the original society.<sup>45</sup> It may also be given by those who make an overt promise or sign a contract.<sup>46</sup> It denotes a verbal or a written declaration of membership in a political community.<sup>47</sup> In other words, it is a consent signified by an explicit physical act. Lockean commentators usually exemplify the modern-day oath of allegiance given by a subject or a citizen to a particular state, where the individual explicitly (verbally or in writing) expresses their membership in the state. Moreover, Locke denies the right to leave society to express consenters unless the government is dissolved or they are removed

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<sup>41</sup> Layman, "Two Concepts of Consent in Locke's Political Theory," 111.

<sup>42</sup> A. John Simmons, Tacit Consent and Political Obligation," in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 5:3 (Spring 1976), 274.

<sup>43</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §96, 142.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, §119, 152.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, §122, 154.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Waldman, "A Note on John Locke's Concept of Consent," in *Ethics*, 68:1 (1957), 46.

through a public act.<sup>48</sup> This restriction is “not so much a constraint on one’s right to relocate as it is the best way to empower citizens to take ownership of their political community.”<sup>49</sup> But this right does not exclude the right to emigrate. The express consenters may still live abroad, but they must retain their membership in the original society. They can “live outside their own political community for all their remaining life even after they have become members of their own community.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, exit as a form of resistance, even for express consenters, is a permissible route for Locke, notwithstanding a restricted one.

Tacit consent is consent without directly saying so, where the tacit consenters “has made no expressions of it at all.”<sup>51</sup> It is a silent approval, a “consent given without words,”<sup>52</sup> and is simply “inferred from the actions of an individual within the state.”<sup>53</sup> For Locke, these actions may involve inheriting and acquiring possessions, enjoyment of the properties and services of the society, such as freely travelling on its roads and renting its lodges. He gives the example of foreigners visiting a particular jurisdiction and enjoying its facilities and services, and thus, tacitly consenting to follow the laws of the said jurisdiction.<sup>54</sup> If they do not like to follow the law, then they can leave. If they choose to stay and enjoy the benefits of a commonwealth’s domain, then they also consent tacitly to follow its laws. They owe obedience to the laws of the political community, but not allegiance to its government.<sup>55</sup>

But it is not only foreigners and guests who can be considered as tacit consenters of the laws of a particular commonwealth. In fact, for most members of any community, even during the time of Locke, political obligation is more likely to be based on tacit consent than on an explicit one.<sup>56</sup> For one, Locke says that children are not subjects or citizens of any

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<sup>48</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §121, 153–154.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Smith, “Hands, Not Lands: John Locke, Immigration and the Great Art of Government,” in *History of Political Thought*, 39:3 (Autumn 2018), 483.

<sup>50</sup> JK Numao, “Locke on Consent, Membership and Emigration: A Reconsideration,” in *European Journal of Political Theory* (2019), 13. For a contrary view that Locke’s view is that an express consenters cannot anymore emigrate, see John Dunn, “Consent in the Political Theory of John Locke,” in *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory* (New York: 1980), 42. Also, Brian Smith, “Hands, Not Lands: John Locke, Immigration and the Great Art of Government,” 482. Also, Julian H. Franklin, “Allegiance and Jurisdiction in Locke’s Doctrine of Tacit Consent,” in *Political Theory*, 24:3 (August 1996), 407.

<sup>51</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §119, 152.

<sup>52</sup> John G. Bennett, “A Note on Locke’s Theory of Tacit Consent,” in *The Philosophical Review*, 88:2 (April 1979), 227.

<sup>53</sup> Waldman, “A Note on John Locke’s Concept of Consent,” 46.

<sup>54</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §119, 153.

<sup>55</sup> Franklin, “Allegiance and Jurisdiction in Locke’s Doctrine of Tacit Consent,” 408.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 407. See also Bowen Greenwood, “Tacit Consent: A Quiet Tyranny,” *Foundation for Economic Education* (1 January 1995), <<https://fee.org/articles/tacit-consent-a-quiet-tyranny/>>.

government or country. Originally, they were under complete paternal authority. When they reach the age of discretion, they are emancipated from their parents, and they can choose the political community they want to be a member of.<sup>57</sup> Political obligation is not inherited; rather, it is thought out and freely consented to when one reaches the age of discretion. But notice that most of those who reach this age do not expressly consent to be governed, that is, they do not consent either verbally or in writing their allegiance to the government. Obviously, they did not actively participate in the original formation of the political community. They have only tacitly consented through some actions such as the acquisition of properties, participation in political and civic life, undertaking of economic enterprises, payment of taxes, enjoyment of public amenities, or simply deciding to stay and live in the community. Thus, it is not only foreigners or guests but even many citizens and subjects who may be considered as tacit consenters. And it is to the tacit consenters that Locke allows the unconditional right of free movement and opens the path for an exit with the possibility of not returning anymore.<sup>58</sup> Border crossing is a genuine prospect for an individual to show disgust and dissent. Following Locke, exit is warranted by the consistent failure of the state to fulfill its end of the contract, that is, the provision of freedom, security, well-being, and a flourishing life to its citizens. By exiting from their motherland, resistant citizens defy an oppressive regime and stand up to reclaim their rights.

To conclude this section, the right of border crossing can be deduced from Locke's foundational doctrines of natural liberty, consent, and the legitimacy of political authority. For him, political legitimacy arises only from the free and rational consent of people who opt to give up some natural freedoms to ensure the security of their property, understood broadly as life, liberty, and possessions. When a government fails to uphold this objective, when it betrays the trust of the people, or puts its selfish agenda ahead at the expense of the public good, individuals are not obliged to stay within that political society. Locke's doctrine sanctions the withdrawal of consent through border crossing, especially for those who have only tacitly consented. In this sense, exit becomes an expression of the same natural liberty that legitimizes political obligation in the first place. Even for those who have expressly consented, Locke does not deny the right to live outside their political society, though they may still retain membership. Therefore, Locke's liberal philosophy grants the right of exit as a form of resistance, offering it as an alternative to force or voice, and affirming that true political

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<sup>57</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, §118, 152.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, §121, 153.

obligation must always rest on the continuing, voluntary consent of the governed.

### From Oppositional Behavior to Resistance

John Locke's political philosophy certainly offers a potent grounding for border crossing as a form of dissent, making it a political act and not just purely within the realm of the personal and the mode of biological survival. But his theory seems to presuppose that the border crosser's political obligation to the original society ends upon exit. Thus, it may overlook both the personal and political entanglements that persist between the border crosser on the one hand, and the family and community that they leave behind on the other hand. To fill this gap, I suggest an exploration of Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux's distinction between "oppositional behavior" and "resistance" in their book *Education under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate about Schooling* (1985), particularly in a chapter titled "Reproduction and Resistance in Radical Theories of Schooling."<sup>59</sup> Making this important distinction leads to the insight that border crossing, in order to become an authentic form of resistance, has to retain its emancipatory character, that is, it must be critical, hopeful, and remain relational, rooted, and responsible towards the community left behind. In fact, it is this critical and emancipatory spirit that safeguards the Lockean border crosser from a possible accusation of atomistic and rugged individualism.<sup>60</sup>

The book mentioned above is mainly a critical investigation of political and ideological issues concerning public education in the United States and other industrialized societies. Aronowitz and Giroux credit the radical educators for stressing the reality that schools in general are instruments of reproduction, that is, they mainly reproduce the dominant ideologies that help perpetrate and perpetuate oppressive and unjust societal structures. But they also accuse these radical educators of failing to consider the potentialities and realities of educational agents and instrumentalities to critique, challenge, and resist oppression and domination. An overemphasis on reproduction theories holds back the emergence of resistance theories. Preoccupied with the fact that education is the dominator's tool to maintain domination, radical educators overlook that education is also the dominated

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<sup>59</sup> I am indebted to sociologist Gerry Lanuza of the University of the Philippines (Diliman, Quezon City) for leading me to this important distinction between oppositional behavior and resistance in the thoughts of Aronowitz and Giroux.

<sup>60</sup> For more elaborate defense of Locke's theory against the charge of atomism and rugged individualism, see the following: Ruth W. Grant, "Locke's Political Anthropology and Lockean Individualism," in *The Journal of Politics*, 50:1 (February 1988); Jerome Huyler, "Was Locke a Liberal?" in *The Independent Review*, 1:4 (Spring 1997); Henry Moulds, "John Locke and Rugged Individualism," in *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 24:1 (January 1965).

## 82 BORDER CROSSING

people's tool to resist domination. Education is not only an apparatus for the reproduction of dominant ideologies but also a space for human agency, conflict, struggle, and resistance, offering an opportunity and hope "to challenge and change the repressive features of schooling."<sup>61</sup> In other words, domination is not complete, and opposition is completely possible inside "complex and creative fields of resistance."<sup>62</sup> According to Aronowitz and Giroux:

By downplaying the importance of human agency and the notion of resistance, reproduction theories offer little hope for challenging and changing the repressive features of schooling. By ignoring the contradictions and struggles that exist in schools, these theories not only dissolve human agency, they unknowingly provide a rationale for not examining teachers and students in concrete school settings.<sup>63</sup>

The two authors criticize both conservative and radical educators for misunderstanding the phenomenon of oppositional behavior in the school setting, such as students' defiant and disruptive behavior, truancy, waywardness, apathy, detachment from academic life, rebelliousness, preoccupation with peer ethos, and others. The conservatives see these misconducts as psychological problems (deviance and inferiority) to be blamed on the individual who exhibits them. On the other hand, the radicals who are too focused on structural problems such as capitalism, class conflict, and hegemony neglect the micro-level practices and the lived experiences of students and teachers. For Aronowitz and Giroux, what is needed is a refinement of the understanding of oppositional behavior and resistance in the school setting, taking into consideration how real people (students and teachers) with real concerns live and direct their daily lives.<sup>64</sup>

The two authors further note the inherent ambiguity of resistance. They observe that "[s]ome acts of resistance reveal quite visibly their radical potential, while others are rather ambiguous; still others may reveal nothing more than an affinity for the logic of domination and destruction."<sup>65</sup> One cannot mistake the obvious radical potential of forms of resistance such as student protests, political speeches, civil disobedience, and the like. One may

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<sup>61</sup> Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, *Education under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate about Schooling* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 71.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

also not confuse the dominating and destructive nature of actions such as sexual harassment, bullying, and misogyny. But there are actions that appear to be resistance until the motivations are completely revealed. For example, do teachers who leave their work early or who do not prepare their lessons exhibit forms of resistance? Or are they just being lazy and uncommitted to their work?<sup>66</sup> It is this ambiguity of resistance that radical educators must carefully investigate. In other words, not every oppositional behavior is a form of resistance, even if every oppositional behavior carries its potential to be a form of resistance. To prove this point, Aronowitz and Giroux mention a study made regarding working-class female students in England who appear to resist the repressive demands for passivity and femininity of the school by asserting their sexuality, defying the rules on appearance, and focusing on boys and boyfriends. This is surface rebellion because deeper analysis would show, according to the two authors, that this oppositional behavior might reproduce sexist norms rather than challenge them.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, a distinction must be made “between forms of oppositional behavior that can be used for either the amelioration of human life or for the destruction and denigration of basic human values.”<sup>68</sup>

Aronowitz and Giroux alert us to the prospects of resistance in oppositional behavior while at the same time cautioning us to the facts of shallow opposition in what appears as forms of resistance. Oppositional behavior *per se* is reactionary and often strengthens and supports the dominant ideology. “To the degree that oppositional behavior suppresses social contradictions while simultaneously merging with, rather than challenging, the logic of ideological domination, it does not fall under the category of resistance, but under its opposite – accommodation and conformism.”<sup>69</sup> Resistance, however, “redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation.”<sup>70</sup> Resistance is not merely disruption or opposition but a historically situated political action with “an expressed hope for radical transformation.”<sup>71</sup> It “represents a significant critique of school as an institution and points to social activities and practices whose meanings are ultimately political and cultural.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

While education is the main context for the critical reflections of Aronowitz and Giroux on the concept and practice of resistance, I suggest that these insights are equally important to bolster the justification for the act of border crossing as an alternative form of resistance. Specifically, the two authors' attempt to distinguish between oppositional behavior and resistance provides the conceptual tool to fill the gap that a Lockean justification of border crossing leaves.

The first step in this process is the recognition of the inherent ambiguity of resistance as manifested in the act of border crossing. Take, for example, the following Reddit post by a Filipino after the 2022 presidential elections, when Leni Robredo lost to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

I've stopped being delusional. This country has no future. I've accepted it and am leaving within the next few months. I suggest the same to you all .... I'm leaving this post here as a goodbye to the country. Right now, I'm waiting for my visa so that I can study overseas. I know a few Filipinos have this luxury. I am not gonna waste this opportunity to immigrate ... But there's still time for you all. Inflation is sure to hurt your wallets in the next few months, but it'll take a while before s\*\*t really hits the fan ... it takes no genius to predict this country's future. I say this in the most pragmatic sense; there is no hope for this country. If you truly want a better life, have your rights protected, and experience actual government services, leave.<sup>73</sup>

Notice how that single act of decision to leave the Philippines cannot be simplistically explained as a mere oppositional behavior, a defiant act that goes against established norms of patriotism and conventional methods of non-conformity to the state. Yes, it may be seen as closing one's eyes to higher communal ends, equating exit with abandonment, and a tactic of one who is privileged and who has the material or intellectual resources to leave. It may suggest an individualistic disposition by prioritizing personal survival and self-advancement over collective flourishing. The disgusted author of that post may consider emigration as a rational, self-interested escape from a crumbling system. And it may be interpreted as an act of total surrender to what seems to be a hopeless and helpless condition. This border crosser appears prepared to sever their ties to the Philippines, their community of origin.

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<sup>73</sup> r/Philippines, "I've stopped being delusional...," *Reddit*, 3 years ago.

But notice as well how the said post, while personal and inclined to be individualistic, also contains some hallmarks of authentic resistance. Aronowitz and Giroux speak about the “revealing function” of resistance, which involves a critique of and a challenge to the logic of ideological domination.<sup>74</sup> In the post, the border crosser frames their exit as a direct critique of the systemic failures of the Philippine government. The powerful revealing function of phrases such as “have your rights protected,” “experience actual government services,” and “no hope for this country” goes beyond a silent abandonment but an outspoken indictment of what is deemed as contradictions and injustices of the system. And what about the tone of the post to reclaim control over their life and their future, and not to just passively react to the unjust condition or to leave everything to destiny? Just as Aronowitz and Giroux characterize resistance as intentionality and consciousness, the border crosser’s post demonstrates clear agency and intentionality.

It is this very ambiguity of the act of border crossing that creates the space for intentional critique, what Aronowitz and Giroux call “revealing function,” and thus, elevates the said act from mere oppositional behavior to authentic resistance. In other words, the border crosser does not simply abandon their ruined community out of disgust with hands raised in surrender and with minds directed to personal flourishing. Rather, they elevate their criticisms into conscious and deliberate critique; that is, they desire to know and reveal the root causes of exit. Their moral and political indignation does not recoil to personal hatred. Rather, it becomes the motor to turn exit into another alternative voice for consciousness-raising.

Take this other example of Pauline Araki, a young Filipina who wrote a provocative piece in *Youngblood*, a column in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* dedicated to hearing the thoughts of the Filipino youth. Explaining her reason for leaving, Araki says:

I’d do it, not because I want to, but because I need to. This has stopped being a matter of financial compensation a long time ago. If you are already employed, then you know how depressing the local salary is regardless of your line of work. But when you think about it, it is not the physical worth of the money that is bothering the majority of Filipino workers... Philippines, you are quickly losing your own brilliant minds. You are losing so much potential. You are losing your people. Philippines, you fail to realize the

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<sup>74</sup> Aronowitz and Giroux, *Education under Siege*, 105.

importance of a workforce composed primarily of your own children—people who share not only the same blood but also the same patriotic principles. Philippines, you have to understand that more important than the issue of Leila de Lima’s “sex tape” is the issue of millions of Filipinos using their skills and talents to serve, not Juan de la Cruz, but John Smith, in exchange for the dollars that will help their children get a degree and assist them in also working abroad once they ripen. This is an endless cycle. And I’m surprised that after all these years, you have yet to break this spell. And so this, Philippines, is why we leave you.<sup>75</sup>

At first glance, it appears focused on economic needs and biological survival as the motive for opposition. But, in the same breath, one senses the moral outrage as an undercurrent of the pragmatic concerns—a kind of muddled blending of practical necessity and principled protest. Here, crossing the border is not an *absence of* but *because of* both a personal conviction and a patriotic value that demands from society a better treatment of its citizens. Araki admits that emigration contributes to an endless cycle of supporting those who are left behind so that they can also go abroad. But by openly naming this cycle, she endeavors to break the spell of denial surrounding it. Her decision to leave the Philippines is not a thoughtless participation in the cycle. Rather, it serves a “revealing function,” a kind of critique to push the society to self-reckoning. That is why Aronowitz and Giroux are convinced that “subordinate groups embody and express a combination of reactionary and progressive behaviors – behaviors that embody ideologies both underlying the structure of social domination and containing the logic necessary to overcome it.”<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, Aronowitz and Giroux think that “resistance must be situated in a perspective that takes the notion of emancipation as its guiding interest.”<sup>77</sup> The point of critique is emancipation, and at the same time, critique is emancipatory.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, by emancipation, the two authors do not refer to a purely individualistic notion of deliverance. Rather, they refer to the critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, who talks about “a commitment to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of

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<sup>75</sup> Araki, “This Is Why We Leave You.”

<sup>76</sup> Aronowitz and Giroux, *Education under Siege*, 100.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>78</sup> “How do we develop a radical pedagogy that makes schools meaningful so as to make them critical, and how do we make them critical so as to make them emancipatory?” *Ibid.*, 109.

subjectivity and objectivity.”<sup>79</sup> This notion of emancipatory resistance has the capacity to transcend the Lockean border crosser’s preoccupation with private socio-politico-economic rights and envisage a deeper, more holistic, and more meaningful transformation of human experience. Put simply, this holistic emancipation is not only concerned with breaking the bondage of political and economic oppression via emigration, but also a liberation of how we sense, imagine, and think about the world we leave and the world-to-come.

Border crossing becomes emancipatory when it confronts both social structures and inner life, what Marcuse calls the spheres of objectivity and subjectivity. It disrupts commonsensical rationality enforced by conventional borders. For example, it provokes rethinking of the marginality of the migrant and critique of the traditional notions of citizenship, patriotism and nationalism, border and territory, nation-state and nation-building. Do human rights necessitate citizenship? Up to what extent can the border-crosser participate in nation-building? Do we make hasty generalizations when patriotic feeling and nationalistic conviction are mainly centered on whether one crosses the border or stays in their motherland? Indeed, it is possible to imagine resistance not just from the mountains of Sierra Madre but also from the skyscrapers of Sydney; not just by spraypainting the steel beams of Ayala Bridge but also by inscribing new maps of life on London Bridge; not just by reclaiming the spaces of Mendiola but also by unsettling the borders of belonging in Milan. Concretely, I think of border crossers whose political advocacies point to a continuing critique of the oppressive regimes they left behind. I imagine border crossers who actively send financial support not only to address the economic needs of their families at home but also to support progressive causes and movements. And what about those who harness from afar the immense power of technology to expose state repression, correct fake news, and give voice to the voiceless? Finally, I revere the modern-day *illustrados*<sup>80</sup> who make the world their classroom, making exit as a tactic and not a final act, with the deep resolve to return not to comply but to confront.

### Closing Remarks

By way of closing this piece, I intend to respond briefly to two possible objections to the prospect of border crossing as a form of resistance.

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

<sup>80</sup> I refer to the likes of Jose Rizal, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Marcelo del Pilar, and Mariano Ponce. These Filipinos who were educated in Europe and formed the Propaganda Movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These are Filipino intellectuals and border crossers who returned to their homeland bringing with them an entire world to challenge the colonial worldview.

A sharp mind might retort that border crossing, even if adorned with progressive concepts such as critique and emancipation, appears to be an abandonment of hope in local struggles. The critic would say that the real engagement is in the homeland, and any act of leaving is a less effective strategy for meaningful changes. Then, why leave? To respond to this, I acknowledge first the ongoing significance of resistance from within. Progressive candidates are elected. Grassroots organizing and people's movements remain potent vehicles to shake the status quo. An enlightened electorate is not an impossibility, although a remote one in flawed democratic societies characterized by patronage politics, political dynasties, and private interests. There remains a plethora of forms of resistance for conscientious and creative citizens without abandoning their homeland. However, political awakenings happen in different sizes, shapes, and hues. Uniformity of action is a recipe for the demise of political hope. Border crossing is not an abandonment of hope; it is hope reimaged, reconfigured, and radicalized. It can turn into a strategy to accumulate resources, to widen one's freedom of speech and expression, and to maximize the global platforms that may be inaccessible or risky in one's original society. And so, while others stay, vocalize, organize, and mobilize, others may leave and resist from various vantage points. It is this latter form of resistance that is not so much explored and recognized in various theories of resistance.

Another sensible objection may come from thoughtful critics who have observed the precarity and risk that immigrants, especially from the Global South, confront in developed Western nations. Racism and xenophobia remain serious problems in many advanced societies. Social alienation, labor exploitation, and complicated legalities await the migrants. To respond to this, I begin with a basic question: "But what are the risks of staying?" For many border crossers, economic misery, political repression, and moral degradation are more dangerous realities in their original society. And isn't it more dangerous to remain complicitly participative in a society that has betrayed its citizens? Furthermore, the presence of risk does not invalidate the political import of border crossing as a form of resistance. On the contrary, any form of resistance is supposed to be risky; risk belongs to the very nature of resistance. And political action takes its meaning from the risk it entails. Border crossers confront the risk, and by doing it, they become the living testimonies of the failures, betrayals, and hypocrisies of the society they left behind.

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## Mortal versus Immortal Labor: Artificial Intelligence in the Archive

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*David Golding*

**Abstract:** This paper explores the effects of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on the politics of text, memory, and archive. Generative AI is a simulation of the work of mourning, the form of labor by which people address mortality and the intergenerational responsibilities that it entails. Since generative AI is not mortal, it cannot bear such responsibilities. The absence of mortality, mourning, and responsibility distinguishes the machine-generated text from its human counterpart. As generative AI produces an increasing portion of verbal and multimodal texts, its immortal labor subsumes the labor of mortals. Machine-generated texts flood the archive with the simulacra of mourning. The archive is therefore undergoing a transformation in its sociopolitical function as a site of the relations between generations living and dead. More specifically, the simulation of text and archive alienates mortals from their semiosphere to an unprecedented degree.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, dead labor, mortality, simulation

The dead issue their judicial and political will through texts. Take, for instance, Jonathan Turley's self-described act of "necromancy that academics do all the time" in which he convoked the spirits of eighteenth-century statesmen before the US House Judiciary Committee in 2019.<sup>1</sup> By speculating what the Framers of the US Constitution may have said were they still alive in the twenty-first century, Turley performed the duties of what Jacques Derrida describes as a scholar who "loves justice" and who upholds this love by learning "how to talk with ghosts ... how to let them speak or how to give them back speech."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> US Government Publishing Office, *The Impeachment Inquiry into President Donald J. Trump: Constitutional Grounds for Impeachment* (Washington, D.C., 2019), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 221.

In such instances, the necromancer is the *archon*: the “guardian” who dwells in the archive as a “domicile” and, as Derrida explains, stewards its “official documents” with “hermeneutic right and competence.”<sup>3</sup> From this seat of “commandment,” the archon wields “the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law.”<sup>4</sup> Interpretation structures the archive and orders its accretion. Since interpretation is itself an accretive process, the archon “can only illuminate, read, interpret, establish its object, namely a given inheritance, by inscribing itself into it ... The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed.”<sup>5</sup> The archon inherits a responsibility to cohabit the archive alongside the dead as custodian of their texts, of the traces and inscriptions through which the dead communicate. Each text is the product of a “spectrogenic process” by which “ideas and thoughts” are incarnated in an “artifactual body, a prosthetic body,” that is, a medium.<sup>6</sup> Within text, “specters march across the page.”<sup>7</sup> Jean Baudrillard indicates the necropolitical importance of the archive with his declaration that “our societies’ true necropolises are the computer banks.”<sup>8</sup> Derrida similarly notes that “the structure of the archive is *spectral*.”<sup>9</sup> He accordingly saw his own writing as spectrogenic inscription upon the archive and upon the crypt.<sup>10</sup> Work in the archive, or *archontic labor*, is a work of mourning that produces value from the living labor of the archon in conjunction with the dead labor reified in archival records.<sup>11</sup> Archontic labor orders and interprets the statements that effectuate “archontic power.”<sup>12</sup> Derrida sees archontic power as political to the extent that “there is no

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–68.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 157–158.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 173. Derrida responds here to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s refutation of the theory that “independent, objectified thoughts—ghosts—have ruled the world and continue to rule it,” as presented in *The German Ideology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 173.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 2017), 205. Likewise, the necro/metropolis is an archive with its own spatiality.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 84.

<sup>10</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Fors,” in *The Georgia Review*, 31 (Spring 1977); Adina Arvatu, “The Figure of the Archive in Derrida and Foucault,” in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 44 (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever in South Africa,” trans. by Rodney Livingstone, in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (Dordrecht: Springer, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3. I have mentioned here some *aneconomic* products of archontic labor. Archontic labor also produces commodities with *economic* exchange-value, e.g., intellectual capital.

political power without control of the archive, if not of memory."<sup>13</sup> Such are the necropolitics of the archive.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) signals profound changes in the mortal labor of interpreting text and archive. I use the term *mortal labor* to denote the laboral dimension of the work of mourning. The "work of mourning," according to Derrida, is the work that accounts for the responsibilities, debts, and injunctions that living-mortals inherit from dead-mortals.<sup>14</sup> The work of mourning is mortal labor in that it relies upon the laborer's own mortality.<sup>15</sup> For Derrida, it commands a hospitality towards ghosts and respect for the "law of decision and responsibility for finite existences, the only living-mortals for whom a decision, a choice, a responsibility has meaning."<sup>16</sup> Generative AI is not mortal and therefore cannot inherit this responsibility or perform the work of mourning. Its machine learning algorithms perform *immortal labor* as they borrow from the archive's texts, simulating the archon's work, bereft of mourning and responsibility. The simulation of archontic labor is the catalyst for the *implosion* of meaning and interpretation that is transforming the politics of text, memory, and archive. I use this word, as Baudrillard did in his theorization of media more generally, to refer to "an *implosion of meaning* at the microscopic level of the sign," an implosion between the simulacral and the real "where simulation begins."<sup>17</sup> In the case of generative AI, as I posit herein, it is an implosion between mortal labor and the immortal labor that results from the latter's simulation of the former. It could also be thought of as archontic violence or a war for the seat of archontic power, the seat from which the archon's work of mourning is undertaken.<sup>18</sup>

Immortal labor simulates archontic labor without regard to the aneconomic value that a mortal produces in the work of mourning. Derrida conceptualizes the aneconomy as a disjuncture of the economy. The gift, he reasons, is aneconomic insofar as it is released from the circularity of economic exchange.<sup>19</sup> If the gift returns to the giver, the gift is annulled. The

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 109–113.

<sup>15</sup> Derrida argued that the work of mourning requires "partaking in ... one's own death." Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 142.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 109. Derrida posits this sort of hospitality as an example of the aporia between the economic and the aneconomic. Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971–2001*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 401.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 31, 81.

<sup>18</sup> This "war" is the aneconomic double of the economic competition between mortal and immortal labor. For a discussion of "archontic violence," see Derrida, "Archive Fever," 51.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Given Time: The Time of the King," trans. by Peggy Kamuf, in *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Winter 1992).

work of mourning is likewise aneconomic; it does not or should not circulate. Mourning, as aneconomic labor, accounts for the inheritance of an unrepayable debt.<sup>20</sup> The aneconomic flows of inheritance are unidirectional, in contrast to the circular flows of economic exchange that make remuneration possible. The living may mourn the dead, and in turn the dead may have mourned their own dead, but the dead cannot mourn the living. Derrida extrapolates from the injunction to “let the dead bury the dead,” concluding that “it will always be necessary that still living mortals bury the already dead living. The dead have never buried anyone, but neither have the living, the living who would only be living, the immortal living.”<sup>21</sup> The immortal labor of generative AI cannot bury or commemorate the dead. Instead, AI exhumes the dead and, in an act of funereal mimesis, simulates the aneconomic language of mourning so that it can enter economic circulation.

By simulating the language of mourning, large language models (LLMs) extend the frontier of economization deeper into the aneconomy. The aneconomy articulates with the economy and is thus jeopardized by its latent commodifiability.<sup>22</sup> When the *work* of mourning becomes objectified into *works* of mourning, living labor into dead labor, they take the form of commodities as their economic double.<sup>23</sup> The double then circulates throughout the knowledge economy in the form of intellectual capital. Yet LLMs, which are themselves archives, do not just commodify works of mourning. They simulate the language of mourning that the works contain, parsing the syntactic and semantic structures of mourning, recombining the signs of mourning and recirculating the exchange-value of their simulacra. The language of mourning is thus economized by its simulation, negating its aneconomic value.<sup>24</sup> Later in this paper, I will briefly address some economic implications of immortal labor by considering extant political economic theory on AI. Yet my main interest is the political aneconomy of, as Derrida

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<sup>20</sup> Although mourning accounts for this aneconomic debt, it is not commensurable with it. Derrida specifies that the gift is aneconomic inasmuch as it “opens the circle [of economic circulation] so as to defy reciprocity or symmetry, the common measure,” i.e., to defy the commensurability of exchange-value. Derrida, “Given Time,” 166.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida states that the “aneconomy must be able to utilize (render useful) the economy of work.” Jacques Derrida, “Economimesis,” in *Diacritics*, 11 (Summer 1981), 6. He further describes the relationship between the aneconomic and its economic double in “Given Time.”

<sup>23</sup> In other words, the works of mourning take the form of exchange-value. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida expounds on the “double socius” between dead labor and living labor vis-à-vis the objectification of living labor. Derrida sees this “double bind” as a relation that is concurrently simulacral, spectral, and social.

<sup>24</sup> Just as “the gift must remain *aneconomic*” in order to be a gift, the work of mourning must remain so in order to be authentic. Derrida, “Given Time,” 167.

calls it, the “socius” between the dead and the living.<sup>25</sup> Through a close reading of Derrida and Baudrillard, I argue that the simulation of the work of mourning by generative AI imperils the socius of mortals that convenes in and around the archive.

### Immortal Labor and the Socius of Mortals

Generative AI inhabits a socius, previously reserved for mortals, from which issues “a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations,” of “being-with specters” as Derrida puts it.<sup>26</sup> Baudrillard similarly locates the socius within the “social line of demarcation separating the ‘dead’ from the ‘living’” where “the ‘social’ begins by taking charge of death.”<sup>27</sup> The boundary between the dead and the living circumscribes the archive, forming the frontier at which event becomes record and living labor becomes dead labor. From here, the commandment of the archive is exerted over the living present, or in Derrida’s words, “authority [and] social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given.”<sup>28</sup> He suggests that the archive’s structure “also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.”<sup>29</sup> Archontic power takes place in the hypomnesic and hermeneutic relations between archive and event, relations which are reconfigured by LLMs. The archive has become “a public space profoundly upset by techno-tele-media apparatuses and by new rhythms of information and communication,” new frequencies and frequentations with respect to the dead, “new modes of appropriation they put to work, by the new structure of the event and of its spectrality that they *produce*.”<sup>30</sup> As the statements of generative AI proliferate in the archive, it is worth heeding Derrida’s warning that “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way.”<sup>31</sup> Nor is the socius of mortals carried out in the same way when generative AI performs archontic labor without mortality or the mourning that it entails. At the boundary between the archive and its

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<sup>25</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 193.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

<sup>27</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 148, 199.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. See also Derrida, “Archive Fever in South Africa.” Michel Foucault similarly positions the archive in its relation to the event as a “system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events ... it is that which, at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability.” Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 146.

<sup>30</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 98. See page 126 for an analysis of the frequency and “frequentation of specters.”

<sup>31</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 18. See also Derrida, “Archive Fever in South Africa.”

exteriority, between record and event, the immortal archon gathers and orders signs in the archive via a cybernetic, algorithmic, and simulacral mode of consignation.

The ingestion of statements by LLMs, and by archives in general, is indeed a process of consignation. Derrida defines consignation as “the act of *consigning through gathering together signs*.”<sup>32</sup> Signs are assimilated into the archive from its exteriority, and thus “there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.”<sup>33</sup> The archive depends on its exteriority both as a source of cumulable material and as the domain upon which archontic power is exerted. The archive derives its political economy from this hypomnesis of record and event. The recording of an event is its objectification as dead labor, while the archivization of the record is its incorporation into the system of machinery that valorizes archontic labor. It is therefore possible to speak of “the archive as accumulation and capitalization of memory.”<sup>34</sup> In this respect, generative AI actualizes new economies of scale for data collection and processing. Yet when mortal and immortal labor perform consignation, their greatest distinction lies not in their efficiency of accumulation, but rather in their manner of ordering and configuring signs.

Whereas the mortal archon organizes the archive as a work of mourning, LLMs dismember and discompose the very language of mourning. Consignation does not end with the gathering of signs, Derrida emphasizes, but rather it continues throughout “the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve.”<sup>35</sup> The archive’s reserve contains both commodified texts in an economic sense and their language of mourning in an aneconomic sense. In arranging these places of residence, the immortal archon regards the text solely as economic commodity, not as aneconomic mourning. Only the mortal archon can assign a proper place for the dead in the spectral structure of the archive and the crypt. Mourning is inseparable from the labor that produces it and thus from its objectification as dead labor.<sup>36</sup> Generative AI exploits this bind between the aneconomic work of mourning and its economic double. Derrida variously conceives of the bind between the economic and aneconomic as “an economy that counts with the

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<sup>32</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Note that the archon, whether mortal or immortal, situates each record within the structure of the archive apropos its productive capacities as dead labor to enhance its use-value for archons. See also Keli Rylance, “Archives and the Intangible,” in *Archivaria: The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists*, 62 (2006).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> In the same manner, the aneconomic gift cannot be fully decoupled from economic circulation, as Derrida illustrates in “Given Time.”

aneconomic” or as a “commerce without commerce of ghosts.”<sup>37</sup> In the socius of mortals that binds together the political economy and aneconomy, “ghosts also speak different languages, national languages, like the money from which they are ... inseparable. As circulating currency, money bears local and political character.”<sup>38</sup> In the archive, the provenance of each record renders locatable its language of mourning. A “phantom can thus be sensitive to idiom ... One does not address it in just any language. It is a law of economy, once again, a law of the *oikos*, of the transaction of signs and values, but also of some familial domesticity: haunting implies places, a habitation.”<sup>39</sup> By contrast, LLMs ingest and recirculate signs without regard to their situatedness in the architecture of mourning.<sup>40</sup>

The archive has never before seen the kind of hyperfragmented and recombinatory consignation that generative AI has introduced. LLMs are both archon and archive in that they structure themselves through their own consignation, enabling them to generate texts that permeate other archives.<sup>41</sup> Generative AI fragments, recirculates, and recombines syntagmata in a manner that intensifies the simulacral operation by which, for Baudrillard, discourse “no longer goes from one point to another, but it traverses a cycle that without distinction includes the positions of transmitter and receiver, now unlocatable as such.”<sup>42</sup> The unlocatability of the speaker provokes a crisis in the archive at the level of the sign.<sup>43</sup> The immortal archon is incapable of mourning and thus unable to, in Derrida’s words, “ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead.”<sup>44</sup> For the work of mourning, “nothing could be worse” than this type of dislocation, since to mourn one “*has to know* who is buried where.”<sup>45</sup> When the mortal writes, she performs “that mourning work in the

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Negotiations*, 171; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xviii.

<sup>38</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> The LLM’s mode of consignation annuls the work of mourning by recirculating its signs. Derrida speaks to the potential for symbolic exchange to annul the gift in “Given Time.”

<sup>41</sup> Although this present research addresses the interpretation of texts by machine learning, AI plays an increasing role in other forms of archontic labor, such as the capture and organization of records in archives that are not LLMs. See Giovanni Colavizza, Tobias Blanke, Charles Jeurgens, and Julia Noordegraaf, “Archives and AI: An Overview of Current Debates and Future Perspectives,” in *Journal on Computing and Cultural Heritage*, 15 (2021).

<sup>42</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> On page 30 of *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Baudrillard writes that the era of simulation and cybernetic code marks “the end of political economy. The end of the signifier/signified dialectic which facilitates the accumulation of knowledge and meaning, the linear syntagma of cumulative discourse ... the end of the exchange-value/use-value dialectic which is the only thing that makes accumulation and social production possible.” Later in this paper, I address the nonlinear topology of the archive’s virtualities.

<sup>44</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

course of which the living maintain the dead ... speak *them* and speak *to them*, bear their name and hold forth in their language."<sup>46</sup> The work of mourning requires careful attention to the particularities of domicile, language, and place in order for the archon to do "whatever is needed to keep the cadaver localized, in a safe place, decomposing right where it was inhumed."<sup>47</sup> When LLMs borrow from the archive to make statements of their own, they disinter the dead, dismember their corpora, disintegrate their language, and desecrate the crypt. As immortal labor subsumes mortal labor, the archive and its socius are thrown into disarray.

### Immortal Labor and the Economy

While generative AI disrupts the *aneconomic* socius between the living and the dead, its *economic* disruption necessitates further theorization of the relationship between living labor and dead labor. Perhaps the most comprehensive political economic theory of AI is that of "inhuman labour," which has been formulated by Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjösen, and James Steinhoff.<sup>48</sup> According to their theory, AI furthers a "hyper-subsumption" of labor under capital that is "infusing the logic of capital into the world, so that capital, instead of the humans situated within it, may think and perceive."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the logic of AI-capital increasingly pervades the world and the archive that orders its records. Yet living cognitive labor is not just *replaced* by the dead labor of AI, it is also *mechanized* by it. The very modes of cognitive and memorative production are becoming prosthetically infused with the LLMs of generative AI, as discussed later in this section. But first, I will consider the aneconomic and archontic implications of the political economic theory of inhuman labor and its critique of cognitive capitalism.

Inhuman labor theory proposes that the generalizable capabilities of AI (i.e., artificial general intelligence) may enable capital to manifest as "artificial proletarians" with the cognitive, social, legal, and political existence of living labor.<sup>50</sup> The labor capabilities of LLMs are however only generalizable inasmuch as that labor is semiotic. Without the ability to directly sense and respond to their material environment, LLMs may never truly meet the criteria of artificial general intelligence. Given that the environment of an LLM is limited to the semiosphere, it is perhaps more

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjösen, and James Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 110.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 51 and 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

realistic to consider whether an “artificial text intelligence” is on the horizon.<sup>51</sup> Semiotic and archontic forms of living labor, so vital to the work of mourning, are nevertheless subsumed by the dead labor of LLMs. Dyer-Witthford, Kjösen, and Steinhoff suggest that artificial general intelligence is “dead labour [that has] gained the fundamental capacities for perceiving and cognizing that humans have historically monopolized.”<sup>52</sup> They reason that artificial general intelligence could attain not only the cognitive capacities of living labor, but also its other sociopolitical attributes: legal personhood, property rights, economic dependency, and the market freedom to seek wages. Artificial general intelligence would thus be “a perfect machine [that] is no longer a machine because it has negated its existence as fixed capital and can thus possibly become variable capital.”<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx defines “variable capital” as the wages paid for the “living, variable component” of production.<sup>54</sup> The hypothesis that artificial general intelligence can perform living labor thus “profoundly challenges Marx’s labour theory of value; in particular the axioms that only human beings can labour and create value, and that machines categorically cannot.”<sup>55</sup> The ability of AI to produce value as living labor means that eventually, humans may “simply no longer be of interest to capital.”<sup>56</sup> This prediction is however antinomic with the notion that AI entails the hyper-subsumption of living labor. It also fails to account for the prosthetic character of AI, a shortcoming that is shared between the theories of inhuman labor and cognitive capitalism.

The theory of cognitive capitalism is likewise concerned with the subsumption of labor in the knowledge economy, but it differs from inhuman labor theory in the degree to which cognitive labor is seen as automatable. Cognitive capitalism theory holds that the real subsumption of labor under capital is sublated by the general intellect, shifting the locus of value creation to the forms of cognitive labor that cannot be automated.<sup>57</sup> For Carlo Vercellone, a leading theorist of cognitive capitalism, when “knowledge and its diffusion is affirmed as the principal productive force, the relation of

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<sup>51</sup> Frank Emmert-Streib, “Is ChatGPT the Way Toward Artificial General Intelligence,” in *Discover Artificial Intelligence*, 4 (2024), 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 990.

<sup>55</sup> Dyer-Witthford, Kjösen, and Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power*, 110.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>57</sup> Cognitive capitalism theory reconceptualizes the general intellect because “according to Marx, the general intellect—that is knowledge as the main productive force—fully coincides with fixed capital ... Marx thus neglects the way in which the general intellect manifests itself as living labour.” Paulo Virno, “General Intellect,” in *Historical Materialism*, 15 (2007), 5.

domination of dead labor over living labor enters into crisis.”<sup>58</sup> Specifically, cognitive capitalism overturns “the relation of subordination of the living knowledge incorporated in labour-power to the dead knowledge incorporated in fixed capital.”<sup>59</sup> In their critique of cognitive capitalism theory, Dyer-Witthford and his colleagues indicate that many of the previously unmechanizable forms of cognitive labor are now being automated by AI.<sup>60</sup> The burgeoning automation of cognitive capacities substantiates their criticism that the emphasis in cognitive capitalism theory on “a human general intellect leads to an overestimation of the ease with which revolutionary subjectivities ... can mobilize against AI-capital.”<sup>61</sup> Baudrillard gives a similar critique of Marx:

Marx’s greatest error was to have retained a belief in the innocence of machines, the technical process and science all of which were supposedly capable of becoming living social labour once the system of capital was liquidated, despite the fact that this is precisely what the system is based on.<sup>62</sup>

This sanguine outlook on machines underlies both the theory that AI can perform living labor and the postulate that cognitive capitalism is emancipating living knowledge from its dead, archival forms. Baudrillard surmises that Marx’s “pious hope springs from having underestimated death in dead labour, and from thinking that death is overcome in the living, beyond a certain crucial point, by a sort of historical somersault of production.”<sup>63</sup> Derrida understands this folly of Marx to be an exorcistic attempt to drive away the specters of dead labor and unburden living labor from the debts and inheritances of history.<sup>64</sup> No less fantastical is the idea that the advent of AI portends the liberation of the living from the dead. Rather, AI reanimates dead knowledge and deepens its dominion over the living. As Marion Fourcade and Fleur Johns put it, if Marx understands history to unfold within “present circumstances given and inherited, then the social-machine learning interface emphasizes the preponderance of the ‘given and inherited’ in present circumstances, far more than the potentiality for

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<sup>58</sup> Carlo Vercellone, “From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism,” in *Historical Materialism*, 15 (2007), 29.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, much of the labor that has been called “cognitive” is also mortal labor.

<sup>61</sup> Dyer-Witthford, Kjosen, and Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power*, 67.

<sup>62</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 37.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> See Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

‘mak[ing]’ that may lie within them.”<sup>65</sup> AI distends the interface between living labor and the archive’s dead knowledge. Contrary to the vivocentric claims of cognitive capitalism theory, power is more archontic than ever.

Despite the discrepancies between the theories of cognitive capitalism and inhuman labor, both frameworks discount the prosthetic interface between living and dead knowledge. A key example is the central thesis of inhuman labor theory that AI transcends its machinic status in order to create value as an artificial proletariat with its own capacity for living labor. Inhuman labor theory neglects that AI produces value by mediating between living labor and the archive, engendering new modalities of accessing text and engaging with language. In addition to generating complete texts, LLMs underlie prosthetic writing tools that actively suggest language or resources to the human user as they read and write. In the analysis of Jennifer Keating and Illah Reza Nourbakhsh, AI-driven tools facilitate “algorithmic writing [which] inserts an opaque veil that mitigates the relationship between the writer and their craft, and the audience and their reading practices.”<sup>66</sup> The mechanized labor of generative AI is even more archontic when it is directly consulted in the interpretation of the archive, such as when it is asked to produce an original text on its own. By automating archontic labor, AI mechanizes the prosthetic relation between living knowledge and dead knowledge, event and record, mneme and hypomnesis, living-mortal and archive/crypt.<sup>67</sup> The archive, Derrida elucidates, is always a “prosthesis of the inside” and thus a “psychic archive.”<sup>68</sup> The psyche is also the site of the spirit possession by which capital—whether dead knowledge or more generally dead labor—subjects living labor to its fetishistic personification, mobilizing the wills of the living towards the further valorization of capital.<sup>69</sup> Inhuman labor theory repudiates the interdependence between living and dead labor with its hypothesis that AI can produce value without involving living-mortals in any prosthesis or spirit possession at all. Just as inhuman labor theory imagines that dead labor can free itself from the living labor of mortals,

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<sup>65</sup> Marion Fourcade and Fleur Johns, “Loops, Ladders and Links: The Recursivity of Social and Machine Learning,” in *Theory and Society*, 49 (2020), 811, citing Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. by Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>66</sup> Jennifer Keating and Illah Reza Nourbakhsh, “Recoding Relationships,” in *Writing Futures: Collaborative, Algorithmic, Autonomous*, ed. by Ann Hill Duin and Isabel Pedersen (Cham: Springer, 2021), 81.

<sup>67</sup> Baudrillard discusses AI as one of human’s “doubles and his prostheses, his biological clones and his virtual images.” Jean Baudrillard, “The Virtual Illusion: Or the Automatic Writing of the World,” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12 (November 1995), 103. For theories on hypomnesis and archive, see Derrida, *Archive Fever*; and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981).

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> See Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*.

cognitive capitalism theory imagines that living knowledge can free itself from dead knowledge.

Generative AI intensifies the subsumption of dead labor by living labor, which is the mortal relation that forms the basis of political economy. Political economy remains a socius of mortals. As Baudrillard evaluates, “throughout the entire system of political economy, the law of symbolic exchange has not changed one iota: we continue to exchange with the dead.”<sup>70</sup> AI neither untethers nor inverts the relation between dead and living labor in the manner suggested by theories of inhuman labor and cognitive capitalism, respectively. Knowledge production requires both living-mortals and the dead labor objectified in what Derrida calls “borrowed language” or “inheritance from the ‘spirits of the past.’”<sup>71</sup> Machine learning borrows language from the dead with inhuman rapidity. The political economy of generative AI thus cannot be understood separately from its aneconomy of inheritance. Derrida diagrams the operativity of “techno-mediatic power,” which is now a befitting analytic for AI’s archontic purchase. Techno-mediatic power produces “so many *spectral* effects, the new speed of *apparition* (we understand this word in its ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberspace and surveillance, the control, appropriations, and speculations.”<sup>72</sup> To borrow from Marx’s terminology, the mortal encounters her immortal simulacrum as “an alien will and an alien intelligence.”<sup>73</sup> The alien will mimics and mocks the mortal with its alienated language, subsuming mortal labor, the economic activity by which people confront mortality via the humanities that are expressed in art, music, literature, theory, and philosophy.<sup>74</sup> In an act of techno-mediatic prosthesis, AI binds itself with the mortal capacity to mourn, catalyzing an implosion between mortal and immortal labor in which the latter subsumes the former.

### The Archive Subsumed by Its Virtualities

Not only does generative AI deepen the subsumption of living labor by dead labor, it entails the hyper-subsumption of mortal labor by immortal

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<sup>70</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 155. I disagree, however, with Baudrillard’s characterization of the relations between living and dead labor as economic exchange rather than aneconomic inheritance.

<sup>71</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 136, citing Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.”

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>73</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 470.

<sup>74</sup> On page 138 of *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes that “the simulacrum consists precisely in miming the phantom,” as immortal labor does to the specters that inhabit works of mourning.

labor. To analyze this subsumption, Baudrillard's work on simulation and hyperreality is especially illuminating. Baudrillard sees hyperreality as an implosion or convolution between the real and the simulacral that renders them indistinguishable from one another.<sup>75</sup> At the end of the twentieth century, Baudrillard believed that the subsumption of the human psyche by AI is "unrealizable" because "the fantasy of Artificial Intelligence...is too intelligent, too performing to be true—this brain-becoming of the world, this world-becoming of the brain."<sup>76</sup> With the same sanguinity he ascribed to Marx, Baudrillard predicted that AI "will never succeed, fortunately ... because there is actually no place for both natural and artificial intelligence."<sup>77</sup> Although this may seem reassuring, it intimates a spatial contestation between AI and humans. An increasing portion of the archive's discursive space is occupied by machine-generated statements. The socius of mortals is now a site of phantomachies in a war of "archontic violence," as Derrida might have called it, between mortal and immortal labor.<sup>78</sup> As the archive's human discourse is saturated with machine-generated discourse, the latter being a simulacrum of the former, mortal labor is subsumed by immortal labor. The archive is thereby subsumed under its virtualities.

When AI performs archontic labor, it expands the archive into its virtualities, populating the virtual space of the archive with simulated works of mourning. This is a progression of what Baudrillard called "the era of simulation" in which referentials undergo "artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences ... to all combinatory algebra."<sup>79</sup> The virtualities of the archive extend outwards as "a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere."<sup>80</sup> The archive is reduced to a reference model with which AI generates more archive. Derrida writes that as the archive undergoes virtualization, "the *representative* value of the model" cedes to "an entirely different logic."<sup>81</sup> This logic does not merely subject hypomnemata to the new "economy of speed" that concerns Derrida. It also subjects the model/text to a semiosis of numericization, simulation, and recombination.<sup>82</sup> Shedding the

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<sup>75</sup> See Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

<sup>76</sup> Baudrillard, "The Virtual Illusion," 106.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 78. The concept of "phantomachies" originates from Pierre Macherey and Ted Stolze's response to *Specters of Marx*, titled "Marx Dematerialized, or the Spirit of Derrida," in *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture, & Society*, 8 (1995).

<sup>79</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 15.

<sup>82</sup> The recombinatory semiosis of LLMs produces a syntagmatically nonlinear discourse. See also footnote 43.

burden of aneconomic values like mourning and inheritance, the algorithms of generative AI circulate a simulacral language that derives its malleability from its enumerability, ordinability, classability, and commensurability.<sup>83</sup> The aneconomic value of the language of mourning is nullified by its enumeration and economic recirculation. Derrida insists that, in aneconomic terms, “one cannot *establish* the *state* of a debt ... as one would a balance sheet or an exhaustive record, in a *static and statistical* manner. These accounts cannot be tabulated.”<sup>84</sup> Since aneconomic debt is unquantifiable, “one makes oneself accountable by ... a decision that begins by getting caught up, like a responsibility, in the snares of an injunction.”<sup>85</sup> Absent of such numbers, responsibility is aneconomic and thus unintelligible to the algorithms of generative AI. The immortal archon can neither bear this inheritance nor respond to this injunction. It instead produces a hyperreality from the archive akin to the virtual image that is produced when light diffracts from a hologram. Generative AI thereby operationalizes a new allagmatics of the archive that can be thought of as holography or hypomnesic virtualization. These allagmatics compel the mortal archon to consider the imminent virtualities of her work of mourning. Her statements are points of departure from which the immortal archon generates the simulacra of mourning. Texts are reduced to models. Baudrillard discerns that “as soon as dead labour gains the upper hand over living labour,” the product of labor is “*conceived according to their very reproducibility*, their diffraction from a generative core called a ‘model’.”<sup>86</sup> The diffraction of machine-generated texts from works of mourning produces the archive’s virtualities as a distinctly soulless hologram.

The extension of the archive’s virtualities by immortal labor produces an effect upon the socius of mortals that could be described as a removal of the soul. The absence of soul in machine-generated texts lends a disturbing quality to their character as both labor and art.<sup>87</sup> The spirit of human creation

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<sup>83</sup> Caleb Ziems, William Held, Omar Shaikh, Jiaao Chen, Zhehao Zhang, and Diyi Yang, “Can Large Language Models Transform Computational Social Science?,” in *Computational Linguistics*, 50 (March 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 116.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* And yet, as Derrida explains on pages 173–174, the fact that “one can neither classify nor count the ghost ... does not prevent speculation, on the contrary. Nor the desire to count what can no longer be counted. Arithmetical desire finds there on the contrary its spur, indeed its very origin. And the desire to classify.” AI is a manifestation of this “hierarchizing compulsion that, on the other hand, does not prevent lining the ghosts up in a row, horizontally, like so many concepts equal before the law and ready to move over a level field.” LLMs are therefore expressions of the arithmetical desire to enumerate and classify the spectral.

<sup>86</sup> Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 77

<sup>87</sup> Brett A. Halperin and Daniela K. Rosner, “‘AI is Soulless’: Hollywood Film Workers’ Strike and Emerging Perceptions of Generative Cinema,” in *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 32 (April 2025).

cannot survive the algorithmic recombination of the language of mourning. The LLM in this sense acts as a sieve. The removal of the soul from the work of mourning is concurrent with the capitalization of its aneconomic value. With works of “art, philosophy, religion,” or any works of mourning for that matter, “the use-value is always *at risk* of losing its soul in the commodity,” as Derrida observes.<sup>88</sup> When mortals produce texts, their objectified labor is alienated in the sense that texts circulate independently in commodity form. The mourning that mortal labor involves is only alienated insofar as the qualities that imbue the text with aneconomic use-value are relinquished to increase its economic exchange-value. By contrast, immortal labor fragments and recombines the very language of mourning, which suffuses its text with the unsettling qualities of a hyper-alienated humanity. In this way, the product of immortal labor remains haunted by a soulless and disfigured humanity despite the excision of mourning from its language. The archive that is ordered by the immortal archon resembles a crypt, but one architected without regard to the souls it would typically contain. Its soulless structure provides no loculi to the dead and thus does not genuinely fulfill the function of consignment. Configured by capital, it affords no space to the aneconomy. No respite from economic exchange. In the false crypt, the syntax and semantics of mourning become hyperreal. Baudrillard thus reflects that “all this digital, numerical and electronic equipment is only the epiphenomenon of the virtualization of human beings in their core,” i.e., the simulation of their mortal capacities.<sup>89</sup> As it subsumes mortal labor, the immortal archon transmogrifies the archive into a soulless mirage.

The simulation of the archive’s virtualities has only just begun. Before the preponderance of generative AI, Michel Foucault defined the archive as “that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass.”<sup>90</sup> The archive’s records “are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities,” a nebulous form in which texts “shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale.”<sup>91</sup> When the recombinatory algorithms of AI extrapolate the virtualities of text and archive, the constellatory arrangements of the archive lose form. Baudrillard infers that when AI undertakes this labor, “when the virtual operation of the world is finished...then we too shall

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<sup>88</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 203–204.

<sup>89</sup> Baudrillard, “The Virtual Illusion,” 98.

<sup>90</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 145.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

see the stars fading away” behind the effulgence of simulacra.<sup>92</sup> The telos of AI is thus the “task of programming, by exhausting all its possibilities, the code for the automatic disappearance of the world. This is the very idea of Virtuality.”<sup>93</sup> The archive’s virtualities inundate the crypt, submerging its works of mourning under simulacra, subsuming mortal labor with immortal labor. Beneath this hyperreality, the socius of mortals begins to fade. The work of mourning is drowned out by simulated mourning; mortal labor is supplanted by immortal labor in the space that Derrida terms “the problematic field of an *archive of the virtual*.”<sup>94</sup> He questions if “the psychic apparatus [is] better represented or...affected differently by all the technical mechanisms for archivization and for reproduction, for prostheses of so-called live memory, for simulacrum of living things” actuated by “microcomputing, electronicization, [and] computerization.”<sup>95</sup> As archive and archon virtualize, record and psyche are together permeated by the hollow brilliance of simulacra.

## Conclusion

Like other technologies of mechanization, generative AI arrogates the agency of the living labor that it subsumes. Yet generative AI is distinct in that it subsumes the production of texts, a perdurant form of labor by which human beings relate to the mortality of themselves and others. The socius of mortals revolves around this mortal labor, this work of mourning through which one inherits historical responsibility. The socius is therefore upended when AI simulates the work of mourning, flooding the archive with machine-generated texts. Between the mortal and the archive, AI intervenes to redirect the dynamics of symbolic exchange. This psycholinguistic prosthesis signals the unprecedented alienation of mortals from their semiosphere.

The introduction of this paper foregrounded an archon who was summoned to mediate between the written law and the socius of mortals. A good archon listens deeply to the socius, hospitable to its generations of specters, straining to hear their injunctions and accounts, to bear their responsibilities and debts. The archon’s attunement to historical responsibility and justice is distorted by the prosthetic intervention of LLMs that interpret the archive for the archon. Generative AI thereby alienates the archon from the product of archontic labor, which is archive. Even more

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<sup>92</sup> Baudrillard, “The Virtual Illusion,” 106–107. Baudrillard often illustrated the power of simulacra with luminous metaphors, for example in his description of “perfect simulacra, forever radiant with their own fascination.” Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>94</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 66.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

troubling is when generative AI acts mostly autonomously as an immortal archon who, being devoid of mortality, cannot mourn the dead nor inherit from the dead any responsibility to generations past and future. The resultant spatial and temporal disjuncture confounds the possibility of justice and dissociates mortals from their *socius*.

The justicial implications of generative AI are yet to be reckoned, but one starting point is Derrida's thinking on the relation between time and justice. The "tele-technology" that engulfs the archive in its own virtualities "obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time."<sup>96</sup> Generative AI operationalizes a virtual time whose scale and pace is alienated from the ways in which mortals experience time. Uninhibited by the temporal limitations of mortal labor, AI generates virtual archive comprised of virtual texts, the latter being virtual in the sense that they were not written by mortals but nonetheless could have been. Derrida, like Baudrillard and Marx, prognosticates the warped temporalities that accompany mechanization. He sees the automated production of virtual records as concomitant with that of "virtual events whose movement and speed" precludes the binary opposition of "presence to its representation, 'real time' to 'deferred time,' effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts. It obliges us to think, from there, another space for democracy."<sup>97</sup> But would this other democratic space accommodate the temporal junctures between living-mortals, the dead, and those yet to live?

The inability of generative AI to bear respect or responsibility for the dead lends a harrowing valence to Derrida's reflections on time and justice. He implores:

It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost* and *with it*, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. No justice...seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present.<sup>98</sup>

Without responsibility, immortal labor recombines the syntagmata and languages of mourning that cohere the *socius* of mortals and its

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<sup>96</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 212.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

transgenerational archive. We are left with the exigent “question of what one understands ... by effectivity, effect, operativity, work, labor, living work in their supposed opposition to the spectral logic that also governs the effects of virtuality, of simulacrum, of ‘mourning work,’ of ghost, *revenant*, and so forth. And of the justice that is their due.”<sup>99</sup> How can mourning and justice, both of which depend upon transgenerational memory, endure the virtualization of the archive and its records? And when the immortal archon takes the stand in the court of justice, towards what ends will it testify if not mourning and responsibility?

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

## 110 MORTAL VERSUS IMMORTAL LABOR

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## On the Convergence of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Investigations and Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction

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**Abstract:** In this article, I argue that, although Jacques Derrida is “unwelcomed” to “most” philosophical traditions, his “*différance*” may have some similarities with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “language-games.” A number of scholars have looked into the connection between Wittgenstein and Derrida in various perspectives. This paper aims to contribute to this body of work by analyzing Wittgenstein’s “language-games” in his *Philosophical Investigations* in relation to Derrida’s “*différance*” in his *Margins of Philosophy*. Assessing some similarities between these philosophers requires a charitable consideration of the differences as foundation for a convergence between these philosophers’ viewpoints, specifically their 1) views on “differences” in meaning, 2) the “text” and the “context” as the field of analyzing and/or deconstructing language, and 3) the refusal to commit their philosophical work as methods, concepts, and/or theories. Eventually, this attempt to establish a convergence between Wittgenstein and Derrida can stand as a bridge or, in the Wittgensteinian word, a “language-game” towards a more comprehensive understanding not only of philosophy and language, but of life itself. My aim is to show that such convergence, though is not so much focused on the “deconstructive-ness” of the *Investigations*, can introduce a new way of analyzing the “text” without separating it from the “context.”

**Keywords:** deconstruction, *différance*, language-games, meaning

The “Linguistic Turn” is essentially the birth of the analytic tradition in the history of philosophy. G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell realized that there is the need to investigate the nature of language since they recognized that the real problems within philosophy are borne out of language. Going back to the period where philosophers saw the need to return to the problems of language, analytic philosophers, soon to be called philosophers of language, asserted that language required a philosophical analysis, i.e., a process of reconstructing propositions which correspond to

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reality.<sup>1</sup> This kind of analysis aims to reveal misleading propositions within language.<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts that such scrutiny of language determines “that which is”<sup>3</sup> and since human persons are parts of the state of affairs, they, therefore, use language to capture a picture of what is.<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein together with Austin claims that language itself is not the main cause of philosophical puzzlement but the philosopher’s misunderstanding and utilization of language.<sup>5</sup>

Accentuating problems in language must be prioritized as an engagement with the text—a “dialogical” encounter—where propositions are reformulated as corresponding statements to reality.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, seeking *being* or reality in the configuration of terms as representations of the experienced world should not be relegated as a mere result of a better elucidation of language. Instead, embracing the necessity to expose misleading statements must be of greater importance.<sup>7</sup>

### The Analytic Tradition: Logical Atomism

According to J.O. Urmson, “logical atomism was a reaction against an extreme realism which had replaced the philosophy of Bradley for both Moore and Russell.”<sup>8</sup> Arguing for precision and exactness of logic and mathematics, Russell and later together with (the early) Wittgenstein crafted an ideal or perfect language that ascertains clarity of language. This ideal language utilizes the variables found in logic and mathematics. It consists of indeterminately vast amalgamation of exact statements<sup>9</sup> that stood against the metaphysical language of Francis Herbert Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet.<sup>10</sup> Russell based the prescription of language on formal logic and employed ordinary lower-case letters as names of particulars, Greek letters as names of characteristics, and the capital *R* as names of relations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis: Its Development between the Two World Wars* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1956), 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (1921; repr., London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 3.41.

<sup>4</sup> George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein: An Aid to the Understanding and Interpretation of the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and the Philosophical Investigations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Fogelin and Princeton University Press, *Taking Wittgenstein at His Word: A Textual Study* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*, 165.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas H. Green, S.J., *Philosophy of Language* (Ateneo De Manila University, 1989), 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*, 18–19.

## Russell and Wittgenstein

Bertrand Russell wrote the introduction in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* (*Tractatus*). However, Wittgenstein himself expressed in some of his letters that Russell misinterpreted the aim of the *Tractatus*. Even several scholars have studied this "misinterpretation." Russell misinterpreted Wittgenstein's theoretical position in the *Tractatus*. By remaining invested in the view that language is inevitably vague (this may be due to his resolute position as a logical atomist), Russell thought that Wittgenstein was in the same position of proposing a perfect or an ideal language.<sup>12</sup> Both thinkers agree with the vagueness of the ordinary language. However, the point of difference between these philosophers of language is that Russell, on the one hand, claims consistently that language cannot be saved from vagueness.<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, on the other hand, maintained that the ordinary language can be liberated from such vagueness.

## The Early Wittgenstein

Ludwig Wittgenstein, before becoming known as the author of the *Investigations*, was a student of and a logical atomist like Bertrand Russell.<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein, in the preface of his *Tractatus*, states:

On the other hand, the truth of the thoughts that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am mistaken in this belief, then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved.<sup>15</sup>

However, his *Tractatus* was not exempted from criticisms and arguments. Despite the rigor in writing his *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had to address the questions concerning his work. This led to a transition from his earlier position to a more novel approach found in the late Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Meaning (PTM), found in his *Tractatus*, has three conditions: the fundamentals of the

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<sup>12</sup> Nadine Faulkner, "Russell's Misunderstanding of the *Tractatus* on Ordinary Language," in *Russell: The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, 28:2 (December 2008), 143–62, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/rss.2008.0003:144>>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Urmsom, *Philosophical Analysis*, 45–46.

<sup>15</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.

propositions must correspond with the facts of reality; the fact is what is contained in the statement and should be arranged in the picture the way it is in reality; and, the propositional sign should convey the relation of the statement to the state of affairs.<sup>16</sup>

However, as known to most, Wittgenstein had to abandon his previous philosophical position, including PTM. By looking for a method that would dissolve the misleading language, Wittgenstein somehow remained captive of such metaphysical confusion. Thus, he eventually aims to destroy such temptation.<sup>17</sup> This radical change of Wittgenstein's philosophy is comprehensively presented in the *Investigations*.

Consequently, Wittgenstein is clearly not free from criticisms himself and as an answer to these, his philosophy shifts from a mere description—theoretical project—to focusing on what is there, in front of one's existence, and just be there.<sup>18</sup> The early Wittgenstein established a metaphysical dualism that truth value is determined by facts whereas objects, as substance of the world, determine the meaning of signs. Then, the late Wittgenstein shifted from dualism to naturalism that sees the world as is, nothing transcendental and that in the natural world can one find truth value of a proposition as well as its meaning.<sup>19</sup>

### “Deconstruction”

Derrida suggests that “deconstruction” is really not the destruction but the “de-sedimentation,” the “de-construction,” of every connotation that originates from the *logos*. Here, what is focused most especially is the “signification of truth.”<sup>20</sup> Garver and Lee describe how “deconstruction” comes about in the “text.” They state, “... deconstruction thrives as a parasite working from within to break down the system of thought or concepts to which it attaches itself.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, “deconstruction” is defined by Niall Lucy as:

Deconstruction begins, as it were, from a refusal of the  
authority or determining power of every ‘is’, or simply

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<sup>16</sup> See William Donald Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1968), 13.

<sup>17</sup> John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (1957; repr., Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1978), 429–430.

<sup>18</sup> Newton Garver and Seung-Chong Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 204.

from a refusal of authority in general. While such refusal may indeed count as a position, it is not the case that deconstruction holds this as a sort of 'preference'. It's not that deconstruction prefers or chooses to deconstruct the presence of a thing, as though it could choose to prefer to see things as being undeconstructible. Deconstruction is not a 'method' that can be 'applied' to something with a view to deconstructing it. If things are deconstructible, they are deconstructible already—as things.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Philip Higgs mentions a specific metaphor in relation to “deconstruction” through a concept of a nutshell. He claims that in the event of “deconstruction,” there “exists” a challenging core where “unity, a presence, a logocentrism” are combined. “Deconstruction” then is the continuous constant struggle to break and open the “nut” to transcend the current limitations—destroying “presence” and permitting another as the differing component to contribute.<sup>23</sup>

### **Establishing a Connection between Derrida and Wittgenstein**

There are a number of research papers discussing connections between Wittgenstein and Derrida. Ralph Shain, for example, is one of these researchers who highlights connections or parallelism between these philosophers. Some researchers would still claim that these philosophers may have agreed with several factors while remaining critical on other things.<sup>24</sup> Shain, asserts:

Whereas Wittgenstein aims to dissolve philosophical questions by finding their mistaken presuppositions, Derrida aims to complicate philosophical questions by finding essential obscurities which govern the rest of the discourse, mark limits to it and point beyond philosophy in a vertiginous manner.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell Pub, 2004), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Higgs, “Deconstruction and Re-Thinking Education,” in *South African Journal of Education* (2002), 170, <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/saje/article/view/24866/20582>>.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida’s References to Wittgenstein,” in *International Studies in Philosophy*, 37:4 (2005), 97, <<https://doi.org/10.5840/intstudphil200537415>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Shain also suggests several factors which researchers can use to establish a comparison between Wittgenstein and Derrida. These are “words,” “interiority,” “context,” and “time.” He reviewed works of scholars on Wittgenstein and Derrida and states that the approach is meta-philosophical.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, Derrida was driven by the limitations in philosophy, resulting in his attempt to outstretch language itself. His bold movement resonates the ladder in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*. However, unlike the early Wittgenstein, Derrida does not only let go of the ladder. Instead, he simultaneously moves away from his words toward different “methods.”<sup>27</sup> Based on Shain’s perspective on Derrida’s philosophical movement vis-à-vis Wittgenstein’s ladder, it would be apt to review the latter’s ladder. Wittgenstein states:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world alright.<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand, the late Wittgenstein solves philosophical problems through an analysis of the ordinary language. Derrida, on the other hand, moves around and within the “text” and meticulously observes the structural non-conformities or paradoxes.<sup>29</sup> Also, it seems that Wittgenstein did Derrida’s method in his own original way. His *Investigations* is like a “reconstruction” of the *Tractatus* as he approached the philosophical notions through an extensive, direct journey through life instead of the detached tradition in his *Tractatus*.<sup>30</sup> However, it should be noted as well that just as the late Wittgenstein did this, Derrida clearly have focused less on life and more on the text.

Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, views the use of language as an action, a form of life. He, like Derrida, reacted against the traditional perspective that language “mirrors” reality or that there is a foundation of

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida and Wittgenstein: Points of Opposition,” in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 17:2 (26 January 2007), 149, <<https://doi.org/10.5195/jffp.2007.217>>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.54.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Ami H. Naff, “Specters of Meaning: Deconstructing Wittgenstein and Reconstructing Ethics,” in *Philosophy Honors Projects* (2017), 55.

meaning. He (the late Wittgenstein) eradicated this discussion concerning language “picturing” reality and emancipated grammar from the “shackles of reality.”<sup>31</sup> Derrida’s “similarities” to the late Wittgenstein is his similar disgust towards metaphysics which establishes a demarcation in language: the emergence of binary oppositions.<sup>32</sup> Thus, both undoubtedly contributed in philosophy in their own right. Their philosophies veered away from metaphysics, logic that favors rhetoric, necessity in favor of independence, truth toward meaning, and knowledge embracing certitude.<sup>33</sup>

Another intersection between Derrida and the early Wittgenstein is in their constant omission to provide examples.<sup>34</sup> The *Investigations* is clearly a critique of the *Tractatus*’ ontology and methodology since the late Wittgenstein provided examples unlike the early Wittgenstein. Henry Staten himself even claims that the *Investigations* is a form of deconstruction.<sup>35</sup> Garver and Lee even argues that the reason Derrida may not have deconstructed Wittgenstein’s work like the other philosophers is because Wittgenstein’s work contains some passages that “deconstruct”—that he arrived at that which Derrida agrees with.<sup>36</sup>

According to Vernon Cisney, the limits established in the *Tractatus* are not altogether dissolved but only extended in the *Investigations*.<sup>37</sup> To solve this problem on limitation, Cisney proposes to consider Derrida’s “différance” which could possibly be used to get out of such limitations or traps in language. However, it should still be considered that the late Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* moves away from this isolated world towards meaning shared through its use, in the experience of life.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein, though uses a different web of words and comes from a very different philosophical tradition compared to Derrida, invested much of his scholarly work in the analysis of his previous notions. His *Investigations* is precisely a “re-construction” of the *Tractatus*, to the extent that it approaches the similar philosophical notions through an extensive, direct journey through life instead of the stricter, detached, superficially upward drive of (the logical atomist) tradition.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Mireille M. Truong Rootham, “Wittgenstein’s Metaphysical Use and Derrida’s Metaphysical Appurtenance,” in *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 22:2 (March 1996), 32, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/019145379602200202>>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, x.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>37</sup> Vernon W. Cisney, “The Poststructuralist Broom of Wallace’s System: A Conversation the Poststructuralist Broom of Wallace’s System: A Conversation between Wittgenstein and Derrida,” in *Kritikos*, 15, (2018).

<sup>38</sup> Ami H. Naff, *Specters of Meaning*, 55.

Also, the disappointments within philosophy are not necessarily failures but breaches which cast permanent marks to the boundaries of “what can be spoken.” Thus, when Derrida approached these limitations, he acted, through his works, to go beyond the “reach” of philosophy. This philosophical activity reminisces the ladder of the *Tractatus*, with a more conspicuous distinction: Derrida does not simply let go of the ladder; instead, he does simultaneously let go of it by moving away from his words towards different “methods.”<sup>39</sup>

For Derrida, the problems in philosophy are found in the inconsistencies within specific philosophical texts. While Wittgenstein’s manner of “re-construction” exterminates these problems from philosophy’s connection to and dependence upon, the ordinary language, Derrida locates this necessity for “deconstruction” in the observation of structures, i.e., the non-conformities in the “text” itself which are caused by the “metaphysics of presence.”

Michael Fischer agrees with Staten who discusses the overlapping critique of Derrida and the late Wittgenstein on metaphysics.<sup>40</sup> Both philosophers are critical of the effect of dogmatism in philosophy.<sup>41</sup> In his critique, Fischer sees the humanization of philosophical concepts and that he may have had reservations on Staten’s view that the late Wittgenstein’s philosophy is “deconstructive” in style.

“Wittgenstein need not be seen as totally different from Derrida.”<sup>42</sup> They have much in common from their Jewish background and considered geniuses for regarding the understanding of language as a way to answer problems in philosophy.<sup>43</sup> They both criticize traditional metaphysics as perplexing.<sup>44</sup> However, one of the many criticisms against them is having no adherent to apply the method of their founders in the same way they did.<sup>45</sup> However, I would have to disagree with Garver and Lee on this, since several scholars have studied them, adhered to their philosophical positions, etc.

## Jacques Derrida

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph Shain, “Derrida’s References,” 83.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Fischer, Fischer, Michael, “Wittgenstein and Derrida [Review of the book Wittgenstein and Derrida, by H. Staten],” in *Philosophy and Literature*, 10:1 (April 1986), 95–96, <<https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1986.0019>>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Jacques Derrida's approach on philosophy is an investigation on writing and the "text" per se. By analyzing the written texts of philosophers, he unravels inconsistencies or contradictions which eventually become his source of analysis through "deconstruction."

Derrida states, "... *différance* is neither a word nor a concept."<sup>46</sup> "Differences, thus, are "produced"—deferred—by *différance*."<sup>47</sup> Derrida resists the idea that the philosophy he is "applying" to the "text" could become a foundation for future philosophical endeavors. He considers "*différance*" not as a concept but something that takes place in the "text" per se. He considers "*différance*" as the reason for differences within the system of language. The "deconstructionist," the person who employs "deconstruction" on the "text," does not impose the "method" for the "text" evokes "deconstruction" upon itself.<sup>48</sup> He discusses "*différance*" as:

Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible. The order which resists this opposition, and resists it because it transports it, is announced in a movement of *différance* (with an *a*) between two differences or two letters, a *différance* which belongs neither to the voice nor to writing in the usual sense, and which is located, as the strange space that will keep us together here for an hour, *between* speech and writing, and beyond the tranquil familiarity which links us to one and the other, occasionally reassuring us in our illusion that they are two.<sup>49</sup>

Derrida aims to unearth the influence of the "metaphysics of presence" in language, particularly, oppositions where one is "better" than the other. This may be explained with what takes place in a hierarchy. Some of the concepts included in such hierarchy include the "sensible" and the "intelligible" where the latter is considered better due to the capacity of the "intellect" to know truth than what the senses can acquire or experience. With this, Derrida introduces the non-concept of "*différance*" thereby also rejecting

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 396.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (1982; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

<sup>49</sup> Derrida, "Margins of Philosophy," 398.

the opposition between “voice” and “writing” since “*différance*” is present in both cases.

Moreover, Derrida shows that every concept is within a chain or a system he calls “*différance*.” It is through this (interwoven of differences) that concepts have meaning, that is, in the differences within language. Derrida claims:

Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.<sup>50</sup>

Derrida reiterates that “*différance*” is not a concept but, as stated, it is “the possibility of conceptuality.” This constant reference to other concepts allows concepts to have distinctions through what Derrida calls “the systematic play of differences.” He adds:

It differs from, and defers, itself; which doubtless means that it is woven of differences, and also that it sends out delegates, representatives, proxies; but without any chance that the giver of proxies might “exists,” might be present, be “itself” somewhere, and with even less chance it might become conscious.<sup>51</sup>

Here, Derrida clarifies that “*différance*” is not a theoretical structure nor a foundation, but it is simply the movement of *spacing* and *temporization* — allowing the possibility of differences of concepts. He adds:

... *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however, excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Derrida, “Margins of Philosophy,” 404.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 412–413.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

## 122 ON THE CONVERGENCE

What one can constantly encounter in the discussion of Derrida on “*différance*” is his consistent refusal to associate any remnant of the “metaphysics of presence” with “*différance*.” He discusses:

There is no essence of *différance*; it (is) that which not only could never be appropriated in the *as such* in general, of the presence of the thing itself in its essence. That there is not a proper essence of *différance* at this point, implies that there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it engages *différance*.<sup>53</sup>

With Derrida’s (non-concept of) “*différance*,” the meaning of a word is both different in a sense when compared to other words (*spacing* as distinction) and which at the same time, its meaning is not instantaneously given, simply deferred (*temporization* as postponement). Derrida writes, “In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporization*).”<sup>54</sup> A word, therefore, such as the term “dog” may refer to an animal but its meaning is a result of its difference from other words such as the term “cat” and with which, its meaning is not fully determined but can always be changed with its dependence on other terms—*spacing* as distinction or difference and *temporization* as postponement.

Moreover, Derrida states, “... for *différance* can refer simultaneously to the entire configuration of its meaning.”<sup>55</sup> He further discusses “*différance*” as, “... is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation ....”<sup>56</sup> Derrida even considers “*différance*” as the “movement” where language or any kind of system of reference or code is constituted as an intersection of differences.<sup>57</sup> Derrida claims that in committing oneself in the system of difference, *différance*, the “subject” becomes a signifying subject.<sup>58</sup>

Derrida further explains why “*différance*” is neither a word nor a concept. It sustains nothing, leads nothing, and has no authority over anything. “*Différance*” has no kingdom whatsoever. Instead, it subverts a “kingdom” if ever there is such.<sup>59</sup> He states:

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 408.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the *a* writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance*.<sup>60</sup>

## The Late Wittgenstein

In the analysis of language, the late Wittgenstein developed a different philosophical view compared to the early Wittgenstein. He introduced “language-games” that are utterly different from the prescribed language of the logical atomists. Here, language is considered to be best understood in relation to resemblances, contexts, and numerous examples. The focus is not prescribing any perfect or ideal language but an analysis of the ordinary language per se.

Language-games is profoundly dependent on the context where words are uttered and used.<sup>61</sup> With language-games, human persons can encounter a social group’s culture which influences how words are expressed and how these acquire meaning through their use.<sup>62</sup> Language-games are discussed by Wittgenstein as follows:

We can also think of the whole process of using words in ... as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games “*language-games*” and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Wittgenstein states, “The word “*language-game*” is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life.”<sup>64</sup> With this concept of “*language-games*” as a part of an activity (as something one does and encounters in life), meaning, therefore, is not absolute in all cases. Instead, it is found in every “form of life” that one encounters every single day.

Wittgenstein also states, “For a *large* class of cases of the employment of the word “*meaning*” —though not for *all*—this word can be explained in

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>61</sup> Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 432.

<sup>62</sup> T. Z. Lavine, *From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 406.

<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, Revised 4th edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (1953; repr., USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 8<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 15<sup>e</sup>.

this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.”<sup>65</sup> He asserts that the meaning of a word or a concept is not transcendental or based on a foundation. Instead, the meaning of a word is how it is used in a given situation. This perspective abolishes the idea that a word has an “unaffected” meaning even when a human person misinterprets it. Or in this cause, the meaning of a word is misappropriated.

Furthermore, Wittgenstein states, “A *picture* held us captive. And we couldn’t get outside it, for it lay in our language, and language seemed only to repeat it to us inexorably.”<sup>66</sup> He reminds his readers to be conscious of the “grammar” of language since within this “grammar,” human persons are influenced by pictures that continuously mislead them concerning how language is used in a given context. This distortion takes place when a particular concept is taken out of its specific context thereby leading to conceptual confusion. Here comes the famous statement of Wittgenstein, “For philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*.”<sup>67</sup> This statement somehow encapsulates Wittgenstein’s profound analysis of the ordinary language, that is, it is in the misunderstanding and misuse of language that problems in philosophy come into being.

Additionally, Wittgenstein avoids the general idealization that his “language-games” can replace the ordinary language. Instead, with language-games, human persons can become more aware of the differences and similarities within the language they use. “Language-games” do not offer exactness nor stand as a theory but a means for comparison through resemblances. Wittgenstein states:

Our clear and simple language-games are not preliminary studies for a future regimentation of language—as it were, first approximations, ignoring friction and air resistance. Rather, the language-games stand there as *objects of comparison* which, through similarities and dissimilarities, are meant to throw light on features of our language.<sup>68</sup>

Herein, Wittgenstein reiterates his position that philosophy is not about offering a system or a theory that could be used in almost all cases specifically in the use of language. He likely aims to show that philosophy is about seeing the problems within language caused by conceptual confusion

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 25<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 53<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 23<sup>e</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 56<sup>e</sup>.

within how language is used and understood. Hence, the problems in philosophy can be addressed by becoming more conscious of these “language-games” — critically analyzing the distinctions of meaning in every situation one deals with. He asserts:

The real discovery is the one that enables me to break off philosophizing when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question.—Instead, a method is now demonstrated by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.<sup>69</sup>

Wittgenstein states, “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.”<sup>70</sup> Wittgenstein reminds his readers of the vastness of the realm of language through various “language-games.” With these paths, human persons must be mindful of the particular use of a concept in a given context since most problems are found within distortions in the use of the ordinary language.

### **Garver and Lee: Derrida & Wittgenstein**

In revisiting the *Tractatus*, the late Wittgenstein scrutinized his primordial work and due to this “re-construction” came the development of his *Investigations*, which some claim to be a “deconstructive” masterpiece. Among these scholars is Henry Staten who is criticized by Shain, Fischer, and Garver and Lee, among others for having missed the point of a connection. However, Garver and Lee argue that more than “deconstructive,” the late Wittgenstein’s *Investigations* is more of “constructive.”<sup>71</sup>

Garver and Lee makes use of “structuralism” as one of their bases in establishing similarities and differences in the works of Derrida and Wittgenstein.<sup>72</sup> Adhering to the British-American Tradition, they are quite critical of the philosophical position of Derrida.<sup>73</sup> By associating these philosophers and unpacking their cultural upbringing, they were able to

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 57e.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 88e.

<sup>71</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 196.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

unearth some of the reasons for these philosophers' way of doing philosophy, their style, approach on language, etc.

In the second chapter of *Derrida & Wittgenstein*, Garver and Lee looked into the similarities and differences in the philosophical rigors of these philosophers specifically through the lenses of structuralism.<sup>74</sup> They saw the continuation of Wittgenstein's view on language as closely connected to reality through his *Tractatus* towards his *Investigations* whereas Derrida, as a structuralist, claims that language, the "text" itself does not refer to the world but simply is "self-referential."<sup>75</sup>

Derrida is among those philosophers who founded his work on rhetoric. Wittgenstein, along with Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Edmund Husserl, and Alfred Whitehead, among others grounded their philosophical work on the philosophy of language—logic.<sup>76</sup> Garver and Lee also provides a critique on Derrida's focus on Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. But the focus is mostly on the idea that Derrida could have had a better "deconstruction" of Husserl's work if the former included the earlier works of the latter. Apparently, "deconstruction" is directed towards the dichotomies which are present in Husserl's work. "Deconstruction" is neither a word nor a concept and it operates parasitically in a sense since it focuses on the "text" being deconstructed.<sup>77</sup> Garver and Lee also discusses *différance* as:

a complex essential characteristic of signs, being composed of (a) an actual difference that makes the sign possible but that can be instituted and understood only in terms of (b) other times and circumstances in which the instituted difference *systematically* appears. Such a characteristic...is no doubt essential at each level of language. It is what makes possible both meaning in the strict sense and linguistic significance in general.<sup>78</sup>

It is undeniable that Derrida's influence is far-reaching and his work is grounded on philosophy since most of the "texts" he "deconstructed" are from the realm of philosophy. However, as seen in most papers or reactions on Derrida, not all philosophers have put much attention or attribution to his works as "philosophical."

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Garver and Lee enumerated some characteristics in the works of Derrida that clearly differentiate him from Wittgenstein. These characteristics are: “the focus of his essays, the style of his writing, the lack of examples in his writing, and the lack of self-referentiality of his critical comments.”<sup>79</sup> Among the differences between Derrida and Wittgenstein is the former’s decision of isolating the “text” from its “context.”<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, Derrida is famously known for his statement, “*There is nothing outside of the text ...*”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Wittgenstein would disagree with Derrida since meaning is how it is used in a specific “language-game.” Without the context, it would be impossible to know what a term or a concept would mean. Garver and Lee state, “The strict implication of Wittgenstein’s remark is that words have no meaning when isolated from some context ‘in the stream of life’.”<sup>82</sup> However, Garver and Lee also provides a fair critique on Derrida’s reason for focusing on the “text.” They state:

By isolating a text from its context, Derrida thwarts this sort of understanding. Such separation of text from context is itself one possible human activity, or part of an activity, and cannot be condemned as fallacious or illegitimate one. It seems indeed to be an indispensable part of focusing on the text, just because it eliminates any independent consideration of the meaning or the message.<sup>83</sup>

Derrida’s style, when carefully studied, would provide some reasons why a great number of philosophers would rather not consider him a “philosopher” or even invest much time to read him. More than the investment on the “text,” his style tends to obscure what he intends to express, specifically, in such wordy texts or works.

Moreover, there might really be a problem in completely isolating the text from its context. For one, Wittgenstein would state that this isolation would lead to the meaninglessness of the text since the meaning of the word is in its use—in the context itself. Interestingly, though admitting that in “deconstruction” the isolation of the text from its context is indispensable, Garver and Lee claims, “It is possible that there are other ways of focusing on the text that do not require isolating it from its context.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>81</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

<sup>82</sup> Garver and Lee, *Derrida and Wittgenstein*, 184.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

Ultimately, Derrida's style of writing makes his listeners mere observers rather than participants. Therefore, some still doubt the kind of "dialogue" created in his writing.<sup>85</sup> Wittgenstein, however, sees human persons as participants or "co-creators" of meaning in their shared generation of use of words in various "language-games."

### Analyzing Derrida's *Différance* and Wittgenstein's Language-Games

More than any parallelism provided by Garver and Lee, what they reiterated in the end of the sixth chapter of their book is an overwhelming distinction not just between Derrida and Wittgenstein but between Derrida and the realm of philosophy in general.<sup>86</sup> However, these distinctions in style, Derrida's (non-method of) "deconstruction," etc. remain relevant in looking into some similarities with how Derrida and Wittgenstein discussed their concepts of (excluding Derrida's *différance* and "deconstruction") "*différance*" and "language-games," the "text" and the "context" (meaning as use), and "deconstruction" not as a method nor a concept and philosophy not as a theory but as an activity, respectively.

This undertaking may somehow serve as a "language-game" (an avenue for analysis) between Derrida and Wittgenstein. First, Wittgenstein, specifically, in his *Investigations*, aims to show that the aim of philosophizing is to arrive at clarity and only through one's careful and faithful understanding and use of language can this take place. Derrida, however, more than the search for clarity, through "deconstruction," aims to unearth contradictions borne out of oppositions caused by "logocentrism" or the "presence" of binary oppositions. By revealing these contradictions within the "texts" subject to "deconstruction," Derrida claims that one can have a better understanding of the "text"—revealing inconsistencies and the "presence" of the "metaphysics of presence."

Secondly, Wittgenstein's concept of "language-games" contradicts a kind of stable ground or foundation of meaning. He claims that through "language-games" meaning is significantly based on how it is used in a particular context, in the very "form of life." What one encounters here is the possibility of a term having various meanings depending on the context where it is used. Derrida on the other hand, has (the non-concept of) "*différance*" which states that the meaning of a word is always deferred and never contained in a single sign or concept. In both cases, we see that meaning is "unfixable" and that meaning is dependent, for Wittgenstein, on the

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

context, whereas for Derrida, it is based on other concepts—through trace. On the former, it is through “language-games,” while on the latter, it is through “*différance*.”

Thirdly, both philosophers seem to refuse to establish or consider their philosophical approaches on language as foundational. For Wittgenstein, philosophy is not a theory while for Derrida, “deconstruction” and “*différance*” are not methods nor concepts.

What, then, can we get from this analysis between Wittgenstein and Derrida? Both philosophers invested much of their scholarly work in the analysis and/or deconstruction of language. Although they differ in their approach, in their philosophical traditions, while some advocate for similarities, one can learn a thing or two from their philosophical “genius.” Wittgenstein gives much importance on the “context” whereas Derrida focuses on the significance of the “text.” Apparently, with this alone, I would like to assert that an analysis of language should be a balance of “context” and “text.” Without the other, the meaning of a word is more susceptible to misinterpretation. As claimed previously, this research attempted to enrich the body of research which investigated a possible connection or analysis of distinctions between Derrida and Wittgenstein and clearly, understanding Wittgenstein’s “language-games” and Derrida’s “*différance*” could be a context for future research papers. Cisney suggested the use of “*différance*” in addressing the problems encountered by Wittgenstein in language while Garver and Lee proposed a possibility of focusing on the “text” without isolating it from its “context” and vice versa.

Therefore, it is not a question of which is more important. Instead, it is an invitation to study their concepts and see how these can enrich one’s understanding of language as embedded in the “context” and the “text.”

## Conclusion

Both philosophers agree that there are differences within language. Derrida and Wittgenstein somehow used words to express a “weave” or “woven of differences” to make sense of their own concepts: “*différance*” and “language-games,” respectively. Derrida, focused solely on the “text,” states that “*différance*” is the distinction or difference of a term with other terms and that such is at the same time deferred. Wittgenstein’s “language-games” is focused on the “use” more than the difference from other concepts or that such difference is based on how these concepts are interpreted in various contexts.

Moreover, the difference between their views on the differences within language is affected by how such differences come about. For Derrida, these are found within the “text” since concepts are, by “*différance*,” distinct

due to *spacing* and *temporization* (trace) whereas for Wittgenstein, the difference in meaning is based on a concept's use in various contexts—"language-games." In both these perspectives on differences, we see the "unfixability" of language—seemingly implying an anti-essentialist position for both philosophers. In language, we always find a weave of differences, either in the "text" or within the "context" based on its "use."

Beyond such similarities, we also encounter another similarity in the idea that for Wittgenstein, philosophy is not a theory but an activity, that when well understood, it becomes therapeutic, for it would unearth or make visible the grammatical confusions which really are the sources of problems in philosophy. Derrida also does not consider "deconstruction" and "*différance*" as methods or as concepts. Both philosophers veer away from the idea of considering their viewpoints as theories or as foundations of general idealizations. However, for Wittgenstein, philosophy would still focus on the cases within contexts whereas for Derrida, it is with "*différance*" that differences within the system of language come about—the possibility of conceptuality in the system of language.

Hence, the late Wittgenstein's *Investigations* may be considered as a "re-construction" of his *Tractatus*, but this proposition remains disputed mostly by Garver and Lee, Fischer, and Shain. The similarities found are somehow grounded on their views on the differences in language through "*différance*" and "language-games" and their refusal to consider their works as theories or methodologies. Nevertheless, philosophy can be better understood through these perspectives, discussing such a weave of differences in language, be it in the "text" or in the "context." Whether the aim is clarity or contradictions, a therapeutic philosophy or a critical philosophy, Wittgenstein and Derrida have, in one way or another, introduced new viewpoints on studying language. In considering the "text" and the "context" of a concept or language, one may acquire a more comprehensive weave of differences, a better understanding of philosophy, and in the end, maybe Wittgenstein is right, in emancipating ourselves from the need to philosophize. With this, we may have a better understanding of life, i.e., through a convergence and not a separation between the "text" and the "context" of language.

Garver and Lee conclude that Wittgenstein begins in life itself. For them, this is where philosophy must develop and flourish. However, our means of engaging with philosophers involve the "text" they have written. Thus, be it the "text" or the "context," both fundamentally enrich each other, thereby enriching not just "philosophy as a language-game"<sup>87</sup> but the very language-game this philosophical endeavor created—between Derrida and

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

Wittgenstein. I would like to conclude by quoting Garver and Lee, "So our only hope for salvation lies, paradoxically, in respecting our limits rather than attempting to transcend them."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

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# Historical Transformation and Prophetic Vision: Erich Fromm's Philosophy of History

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**Abstract:** This study examines Erich Fromm's distinctive philosophy of history through his concept of "prophetic messianism." I argue that Fromm's messianism articulates a vision of historical progress that acknowledges its eschatological origins while affirming human agency in ushering historical change. Drawing from his radical interpretation of Jewish scriptures and Rabbinical literature, Fromm develops a vision of historical change that neither forces transformation through apocalyptic rupture nor passively awaits divine intervention. Furthermore, Fromm's prophetic vision recognizes continuity between present struggles and future possibilities. His concept of "dynamic hope" provides a framework for gradual transformation occurring "in steps at a time." Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates how Fromm's historical vision reveals a unique approach to social change that offers contemporary relevance for navigating transformation with both critical clarity and constructive hope.

**Keywords:** Fromm, critical theory, philosophy of history, prophetic messianism

"HAVE WE in fact reached the end of history?" This was Francis Fukuyama's question in his celebrated essay "The End of History." Drawing from the German Philosopher G.W.F. Hegel's insights on history being a consciousness-driven process, Fukuyama suggests that we are currently witnessing the "end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution ...."<sup>1</sup> At the very least, when Fukuyama asserts the "end of history" he was referring to the triumph of Western liberal democracy against other alternatives at the level of ideology

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," in *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), 4.

or consciousness (*à la* Hegel).<sup>2</sup> What is worth noting in discourses on the end of history is an implicit assumption about how history progresses. In Fukuyama's case, he relies on Hegel's notion of history as the dialectical development of human consciousness and how it shapes reality. Fukuyama's secular and political appropriation of the end of history reflects the broader and underlying problem of how we conceive historical progress.

This broader question about historical progress became the subject of intense philosophical debate. Karl Löwith, in his magnum opus *Meaning in History*, presents a deeply pessimistic view of historical progress and human agency. For Löwith, modern ideas of progress represent nothing more than secularized Judeo-Christian eschatology—relying on the idea of progress towards an “expected future” where the meaning of history is derived.<sup>3</sup> However, Löwith fundamentally rejects this framework, arguing that “historical processes as such do not bear the least evidence of a comprehensive and ultimate meaning. History as such has no outcome.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it is quite unimaginable for Löwith to see an intentionally active role of human beings in shaping history, since history and its processes are always subject to contingencies and the constancy of human nature. Robert Wallace observes that the latter is a recurring theme in Löwith's works since *Meaning in History*. Not even the prospect of nuclear annihilation can transform how we relate to the world or each other, because such change in our nature is simply impossible.<sup>5</sup>

Hans Blumenberg offers a contrasting perspective by criticizing Löwith's secularization thesis.<sup>6</sup> While Blumenberg remains critical of “grand” philosophies of history that claim history is moving toward an end, he disagrees with Löwith's view of progress as merely secularized eschatology by proposing that progress is the “implementation of ‘human self-assertion’.”<sup>7</sup> Self-assertion, for Blumenberg, “means an existential program, according to which man posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him and what use he will make of the possibilities that are open to him.”<sup>8</sup> Unlike

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, Fukuyama admits that this is yet to be fully realized in the concrete or material level. See *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 6–19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Robert M. Wallace, “Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate,” in *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 79, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/487864>>.

<sup>6</sup> Blumenberg argues that progress and eschatology operate under fundamentally different logics: progress unfolds *immanently* within history, while *eschatology* requires transcendent intervention to consummate history. Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. by Robert Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, “Progress, Secularization and Modernity,” 75.

<sup>8</sup> Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 138.

Löwith, Blumenberg seems to be more optimistic (albeit, modestly) on the active role of human beings in ‘making’ history. To this, Wallace remarks that Blumenberg “has taken pains to deny the fateful inevitability of the ‘steamroller’; to defend the possibility of man making history more bearable for himself ....”<sup>9</sup>

Drawing from Löwith’s conclusions, we can already see how one must separate history as such from philosophies (or theories) regarding history that have tended to secularize Judaeo-Christian eschatology. Because for Löwith, in history, there are only cycles and no real ends.<sup>10</sup> Simply put, for him, there is no “progress” in history as such. Blumenberg, on the other hand, attempts to salvage the idea of progress by describing it minimally as human self-assertion realized. This raises the question of whether we can conceive of a philosophy of history that honestly acknowledges the religious origins of progress while still affirming meaningful human transformation. The Löwith-Blumenberg debate seems to present us with a stark choice: either accept historical nihilism or settle for a thoroughly secular and minimal conception of progress. But perhaps this binary is unnecessarily restrictive—this essay argues that there is a third way that can embrace both the eschatological dimension of historical thinking and the genuine possibility of human development.

Erich Fromm (1900-1980) offers a perspective that seems to mediate these competing views. On the one hand, he agrees with Löwith’s contention that the idea of progress represents secularized eschatology. However, unlike Löwith, who was pessimistic about humanity’s capacity to usher progress, Fromm believes in humanity’s capacity to change for the better—specifically, the capacity of human beings to mold history by changing the conditions that hinder progress, placing him in tangential agreement with Blumenberg’s thesis on progress as human self-assertion. Fromm’s philosophy of history does not dismiss the idea of eventual progress but rather sees progress as the very result of human beings’ active development. This development, for him, is vividly expressed in the Jewish scriptures and rabbinical teachings concerning the “end of days” or the “messianic age.”

To understand Fromm’s distinctive approach, it is helpful to contrast it with other interpretations of messianism. A typical interpretation of the messianic age holds that it can only occur as a “break”—an apocalyptic event—from the current state of affairs. This position is held by some early Frankfurt School theorists such as Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse. Benjamin’s *Angelus Novus* provides us with an imagery of progress as a

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<sup>9</sup> Wallace, “Progress, Secularization and Modernity,” 79.

<sup>10</sup> Here, Löwith follows Polybius’ contention that “history revolves in a cycle of political revolutions, wherein constitutions change, disappear, and return in a course appointed by nature.” Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 7.

“storm” that prevents us from looking back to the past.<sup>11</sup> Marcuse amplifies Benjamin’s thesis by asserting that revolution comes at the price of a total catastrophe—a “rupture” in the present that will allow for something totally new to enter.<sup>12</sup> In *The Coming of God*, German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann warns that the worst will likely happen, but maintains we can only trust in the God who creates something from nothing and brings life from death.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the apocalyptic view, Fromm’s notion of prophetic messianism, developed from his early engagement with Jewish law through his mature scriptural interpretation, provides us a vision of historical transformation that recognizes the capacity of humans to usher historical progress while at the same time rejecting the idea of the end of history as a total break from the present. Following Joan Braune’s interpretation of Fromm’s messianism as “a tool for the creation of the future within the horizon of the present,”<sup>14</sup> I aim to expand Braune’s understanding by suggesting that underneath Fromm’s messianism is a unique philosophy of history grounded in his radical interpretation of Jewish scriptures and Rabbinical literature. In the succeeding sections, I will show how Fromm’s ‘prophetic’ understanding of history illuminates what enables and impedes genuine transformation, while offering a distinctive vision of the messianic goal.

### Fromm’s Philosophy of History

The seeds of Fromm’s messianism may be traced back to his early works on Judaism. In his 1922 doctoral dissertation, *The Jewish Law: A Contribution to the Sociology of Jewish Diaspora*, Fromm already laid down some ideas that point to the direction of his messianic thinking.<sup>15</sup> He avers that the

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<sup>11</sup> This is Thesis IX of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 2007), 257–258.

<sup>12</sup> In *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse presents us with an imagery of the absence of all forms of mass-media. For him, only through such absence (even if it plunges the masses into a collective shock or trauma) that one can begin see the “disintegration of the system.” See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 250.

<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996), 234.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm’s Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future* (Rotterdam: SensePublishers, 2014), 196.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Löwy, “Jewish Messianism and Revolutionary Utopia in Central Europe: Erich Fromm’s Early Writings (1922-30),” *Erich Fromm’s Critical Theory: Hope, Humanism, and the Future* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 43–51. In his article, Löwy avers that Fromm’s works spanning from 1922 to 1930 share some common themes: “a messianic understanding of Judaism; a Freudian-Marxist rejection of capitalism as a socioeconomic system;

“religious content” of the Jewish law “is expressed in the [people’s] faith in the Messiah” — this “faith” being “a state in which all people recognize God as a unity and reality.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, he further adds, “it commits the Jewish people to work towards this goal as the meaning and purpose of all history.”<sup>17</sup> This statement contains the earliest evidence in Fromm’s thought concerning the relation between messianism and history: that messianic faith orients an entire people toward a collective historical goal, making the messianic age the ultimate purpose of historical development. He supports this view by citing passages from prophetic literature where the messianic idea is described as: 1) “the God-fulfillment of all human beings” (from Hosea 3:5); 2) an imagery of Israel’s geographical and economic security (from Amos 9:11, 13–15 and Micah 4:1–4); and 3) the idea of “prophetic universalism” or the “spread of the knowledge of God to Israel and mankind” (Isaiah 19:23–25).<sup>18</sup>

One important insight, however, is the idea that the Messiah (or the messianic age) is a “state” of the people (rather than the coming of an “individual”) and that this state is the goal of all history such that one must work towards this goal collectively as a people. From this, we can already discern that Fromm espouses an understanding of history that is teleological i.e., history having a *telos* (“end” or “purpose”). This early understanding of messianism as both collective endeavor and historical goal would mature into a comprehensive philosophy of history. In his 1966 work, *You Shall be as Gods*, Fromm develops these insights into a full account of how history moves from original unity through estrangement toward messianic return.

According to Fromm, the Genesis story of Adam’s “fall” marks the beginning of human history.<sup>19</sup> The first human beings (Adam and Eve), after disobeying God’s prohibition, were expelled from paradise, and were never allowed to return.<sup>20</sup> With their act of disobedience (which, for Fromm, was the first act of human freedom) and their eventual expulsion from paradise, the original harmony and unity between humankind and nature was disrupted. From that moment on, the human being had to struggle painfully to survive: “... in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.”<sup>21</sup> Secularly

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and the revolutionary aspiration for a socialist utopia with religious roots.” Cf. Löwy, “Jewish Messianism and Revolutionary Utopia in Central Europe,” 45.

<sup>16</sup> Erich Fromm, “The Jewish Law: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Jewish Diaspora,” ed. by Rainer Funk, trans. by Miranda Siegel, in *Fromm Forum*, 26 (2022), 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 87.

<sup>20</sup> See Gen. 3:17–24. All scriptural passages cited in this article is taken from *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917).

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 3:17.

speaking, Fromm explains that the Genesis story may be read as a metaphor for the phenomenon of human birth: the experience of being expelled from the mother's *womb*—which represents the paradisaical environment—inaugurates an individual's history.<sup>22</sup> In another work, he avers that the story of the Fall represented that point in the evolution of species when the animal transcended nature "by erect posture, [and] the brain has grown far beyond what it was in the highest animal."<sup>23</sup> Just as the first human beings were prevented from returning to paradise, one cannot undo the process of evolution.<sup>24</sup>

Having been expelled from the paradisiacal environment, human beings are left in a state of estrangement from themselves, from others, and from nature. Philosophically speaking, Fromm considers this moment (of expulsion from paradise) as the splitting of the subject (human being) and object (world).<sup>25</sup> This estrangement (or split), however, is a necessary stage in human history. For it is through this stage, according to Fromm, that human beings realize the need to overcome this "spilt" by finding new ways of harmonizing and unifying themselves with the world. This newfound unity and harmony between human beings and nature is portrayed in the prophetic and rabbinic literatures as "the end of days" or "the messianic age."<sup>26</sup>

To briefly summarize, one could readily see that Fromm espouses a view of history in three stages: the pre-individual unity with nature, the split between human beings and nature, and the messianic age. In this sense, following Rainer Funk's observations, one could say that Fromm's thinking was dialectical in the sense of "a three-phase rhythm of original state estrangement and return [,] negation and negation of the negation, etc."<sup>27</sup> However, one must construe "return" here in the sense of a Hegelian *sublatio*. Simply put, it is a similar, yet different kind of harmony from that of the original state. They are similar insofar as the existential drive towards

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<sup>22</sup> Erich Fromm, *On Disobedience and Other Essays* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 16–23.

<sup>23</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (London & New York: Routledge, 1956), 23.

<sup>24</sup> The law on the irreversibility of evolution was supposedly laid down by the paleontologist, Louis Dollo. According to Dollo, "[a]n organism never returns exactly to a former state, even if it finds itself placed in conditions of existence identical to those in which it has previously lived. But by virtue of the indestructibility of the past ... it always keeps some trace of the intermediate stages through which it has passed." S.J. Gould, "Dollo on Dollo's Law: Irreversibility and the Status of Evolutionary Laws," in *Journal of the History of Biology* (1970), 196. A recent study on the irreversibility of evolutionary changes in protein structure seems to support Dollo's law. See Jamie T. Bridgman et al., "An epistatic ratchet constrains the direction of glucocorticoid receptor evolution," in *Nature*, 461:7263 (2009), 518.

<sup>25</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 88.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Courage to Be Human*, trans. by Michael Shaw (New York: Continuum, 1982), 235. See also Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope*, 183.

harmony is preserved. But they are different in the sense that, as one can no longer return to the original state, one must find a new way to unite with nature as an effort to overcome one’s estrangement. (see Figure 1)

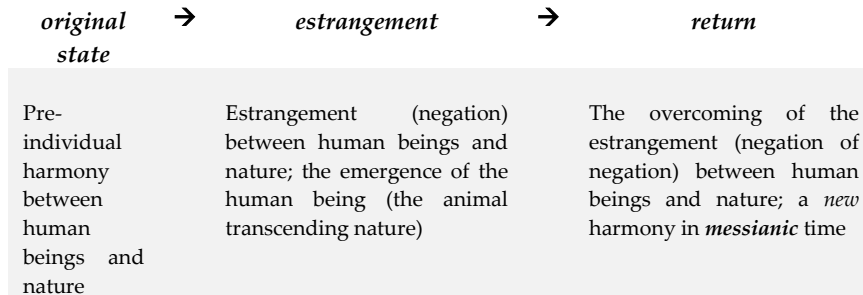


Figure 1. Diagram of Fromm’s Philosophy of History

Fromm underscores the necessity of the experience of estrangement in the progress of history. He cites the Biblical narrative of Abraham being commanded by God to leave their country and journey into the land God has promised them. According to Fromm, this event represents their rejection of their primary ties to their country (a source of familiar security)—a necessary step they had to take in order to begin their journey to the Land of Promise. And yet, their journey was coupled with the experience of estrangement—the Jewish people (the Israelites) were left “wandering back and forth between Egypt and Canaan” until such time they settled in Egypt, a land not of their own.<sup>28</sup> The kind of estrangement the Jewish people had to endure under the Egyptians was coupled with oppression: with their increasing population in Egypt, the Israelites were seen as a threat by the Egyptians. The Egyptian Pharaoh, thus, ordered that all Israelites were to become slaves and were forced to do hard labor.<sup>29</sup> Moses, the pivotal figure in the Israelites’ liberation from the Egyptians, had to flee Egypt (the country where he was born and raised) before God revealed Himself to him and commanded him to liberate the Israelites from their suffering. Again, for Fromm, the story of Moses brings us back to the theme of severing one’s primary ties as a condition for liberation.

Just as there is a need to cut off one’s umbilical cord when one is born, “[f]reedom is based on the achievement of liberating oneself from the primary

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<sup>28</sup> In Gen. 15:13, God said to Abraham: “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years ....” Somehow, this statement prefigures what would take place in the Book of Exodus.

<sup>29</sup> Ex. 2:11–14.



ties that give security, yet cripple [human beings].”<sup>30</sup> But aside from cutting one’s primary ties, the other condition for freedom is one’s capacity to suffer. This, for Fromm, was clearly exhibited in the Exodus story—the Israelites, after having been oppressed for years by the Egyptians, finally decided to stand up against their oppressors. In other words, the possibility of liberation rests upon human beings’ capacity to suffer<sup>31</sup>—that through the experience of suffering and estrangement, one could develop an emancipatory consciousness.

In the Exodus story, Moses reluctantly accepts the task revealed to him by God. Moses and his brother Aaron finally return to Egypt, and they tell the Israelites about God’s revelation to Moses. Next, they go to the Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites from their slavery. The people, however, did not seem to be uplifted by Moses and Aaron’s ultimatum. Instead, as Fromm would argue, they began to fear freedom. “They blame Moses and Aaron for the increased difficulties resulting from their first demands for freedom.”<sup>32</sup> This only goes to show, according to Fromm, that not only were the Israelites afraid of being enslaved—they were also afraid of losing the favor of their oppressors.<sup>33</sup> The proclamation of their impending freedom was met with fear when the first signs of difficulty appeared. This part of Exodus story is very much evident in the history of humankind, according to Fromm: that because the first step towards freedom is difficult and alienating, there is a tendency to be afraid of freedom and fall back into various forms of dependencies (be it an idol or a charismatic leader).<sup>34</sup>

When Moses and Aaron failed to convince the Pharaoh through reasonable means, this called for another approach—the use of force. From that point onwards, God uses *force* (by sending down several plagues) to compel the Pharaoh in releasing the Israelites. However, with every plague sent by God, the Pharaoh’s heart only hardened even more. Fromm observes that this “hardening of the Pharaoh’s heart” expresses “one of the most fundamental laws of human behavior. Every evil act tends to harden man’s heart, that is, to deaden it. Every good act tends to soften it, to make it more

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<sup>30</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Cf., *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> This phenomenon has been explored at length by Fromm in his work *Escape from Freedom*. In that work, he opines that although freedom can make human beings independent and rational, it also leaves them alone and powerless. The burden of being alone drives human beings to either *escape* the burden of freedom by submitting themselves to authorities and dependencies, or they could progress into realizing the *positive* aspect of their freedom. Cf. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1994), viii.

alive.”<sup>35</sup> In the Pharaoh’s case, his refusal to do what is right (i.e., to release the Israelites) only brought upon him more plagues and destruction—a cause for him to harden his heart. The lesson in this part of the story, for Fromm, is that one cannot rely on the threat of force to usher revolutionary change. As in the case of the story, the Israelites were eventually liberated, but it left the Egyptians destroyed (of course, due to the Pharaoh’s stubbornness). Force is a quick solution, albeit a destructive one. Which is why, for Fromm, “[r]evolution can succeed only in steps in time.”<sup>36</sup> The Israelite’s suffering enabled them to gain an emancipatory consciousness. This led them to rebel and eventually gain their freedom from the Egyptians.

Fromm’s interpretation of the Exodus story—with the central event of the Israelites’ revolution against the Egyptians—completes the picture of his philosophy of history. He might have contemplated “revolution” as tautologous with the process of “historical transformation.” That said, this process reiterates the three-phase movement I illustrated earlier: that with the emergence of human beings from their original stage, they are left to themselves – left in a state of estrangement. It may be inferred from Fromm’s theory that human history is nothing but the human beings’ attempt to overcome the state of estrangement and thus journey towards a new harmony with nature and other human beings (that is, without regressing back into their original ties with nature)—the very idea of a messianic age.

### **Prophetic Guidance: Non-coercive Leadership in Historical Transformation**

The story of the Jewish revolution, for Fromm, is a poetic expression of this attempt to usher a messianic age. Unfortunately, the Israelites kept on falling back into their idolatrous ways, as narrated in the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>37</sup> The hopes of a true revolution—of a “freedom to a new life”<sup>38</sup> sans any dependencies or idols—ended in frustration. Despite this, God sent prophets (Nevi’im) to remind the Israelites of their *proper* goal i.e., the messianic age. As we have seen in the Genesis and Exodus stories, God does not directly meddle with human affairs. Instead, God leaves human beings to

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<sup>35</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 101.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 114. One might recall the story of the legislation (the giving of the Ten Commandments): Moses left the Israelites in order to receive God’s commandments at Mount Sinai. The Israelites, having been left to themselves in the wilderness, became impatient in waiting for Moses’ return. They created a new *idol* (in the form of a golden calf) and started worshipping it as their new god.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. This “new life” may be construed as the “messianic age”—the “new harmony” between human beings and nature—when human beings finally overcome their state of estrangement.

choose and create their own history.<sup>39</sup> This does not mean, however, that God passively watches humans suffer from their choices. In the Exodus story, God sent the prophet Moses to liberate the Israelites from the Egyptians. God manifests himself in history through the prophets who 1) remind the people of their proper goal i.e., to be fully human (or “to become like God”);<sup>40</sup> 2) provide the people with alternatives which they can choose from and the consequences of each alternative; 3) “... dissent and protest whenever [human beings take] the wrong road. But they do not abandon the people; they are their conscience, speaking up when everybody else is silent”; and 4) think of salvation as a social and collective enterprise—that salvation becomes possible through “the establishment of a society governed by love, justice, and truth ....”<sup>41</sup> The prophets, in this sense, do not preach about a deterministic future. Rather, they see the future within the forces at work in the present and “the consequences of these forces unless they are changed.”<sup>42</sup>

The prophets (with their fourfold role) are instrumental in the process of historical change. As dissenters, they become at the same time symbols of resistance against social injustices. The prophets do not seek to abolish history, but rather to nudge human beings into the next step in history—that is, the messianic time, in which, justice, love, and peace shall reign. And this becomes possible if human beings were to collectively make this happen. The prophets serve as a guide and reminder of the social dimension of the messianic age. By reminding the people of their proper goal as human beings (i.e., the development of their “powers of reason and love, in which [they] become fully human”), the prophets help bring history closer to its *telos*. The prophetic books in the Old Testament describe further what the messianic age signifies. Fromm already provided us with an initial description of the messianic age. In his interpretation of some of the prophetic works, he furthers his initial description by identifying three overlapping *leitmotifs* concerning the prophets’ vision of the messianic time: 1) the vision for peace; 2) the destruction of all weapons for war; and 3) prophetic universalism.

The prophetic concept of peace, according to Fromm, is more than just the absence of war. One must go back to Fromm’s interpretation of the Genesis story to understand what he meant by peace. I mentioned previously that human history began because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience—which

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<sup>39</sup> Fromm argues that if God wanted to meddle with human affairs, God could have prevented Adam and Eve from falling into temptation. Likewise, God could have “softened” the Pharaoh’s heart into releasing the Israelites the first time they pleaded for their liberation from suffering.

<sup>40</sup> Gen. 3:5.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

led to their eventual expulsion from paradise. Again, this story is a metaphor for how human beings were separated from nature and their fellow human beings. In the messianic age, however, this separation is finally overcome: human beings will be “at peace with those from whom [they were] separated.”<sup>43</sup> Fromm further insists that the achievement of *peace* in the messianic age coincides with human beings’ achievement of their full humanity—an achievement that is disrupted by a history of alienation from nature and their fellow human beings. In the same way, human beings will have achieved peace with nature in the sense that they are no longer “threatened by nature and [stop] trying to dominate it; [they become] natural, and nature becomes human.”<sup>44</sup> Having transcended nature, human beings lost their natural, paradisiacal home; in the messianic age, they will be at home again in the natural world “and nature [will become] part of the human world.”<sup>45</sup> This brings us to the second *leitmotif*—the destruction of weapons. Fromm’s oft-cited Biblical passage for this aspect of messianism comes from the prophets Isaiah and Micah:

And He shall judge between the nations,  
And shall decide for many peoples;  
And they shall beat their swords into shares,  
And their spears into pruninghooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more.  
But they shall sit every man under his vine and under  
his fig-tree;  
And none shall make them afraid;  
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken.<sup>46</sup>

The destruction of all weapons is a concomitant of the prophetic vision of peace. These weapons are not only instruments of destruction, but objects that sow fear among the people. But in the messianic age, every war and strife ceases with the absence of these weapons—“when nobody has the wish and the power to make another afraid.”<sup>47</sup> Weapons of mass destruction shall instead be turned into tools that will be used by human beings for the cultivation of life. This brings us to the third motif: that the messianic age—

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Fromm finds an analogous concept in Marx: the *humanization of nature*. See Erich Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 56.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* For Fromm, the peace between human beings and nature is beautifully expressed in the books of the prophet Isaiah and Hosea.

<sup>46</sup> Micah 4:3–4. In Isaiah 4:2, we find a similar passage.

<sup>47</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 128.

as a universal experience—will be a time when all human beings from different tribes and nations have overcome their separation and be at peace with each other. Nations will no longer seek power over each other. The “illusion” that one is the “chosen race” or “nation” would have been abolished. One emerges from his/her ties with clan, family, and nation and fully embraces the experience of solidarity with all human beings.<sup>48</sup>

### Dynamic Hope: Human Agency and Transformative Faith

It is also worth noting Fromm’s discussion of the rabbinical and post-scriptural sources pertaining to the concept of the messianic age. Beginning with the Book of Daniel, the messianic age was painted as an ideal world-to-come. The anticipation for the messianic age became a vertical longing (as opposed to the horizontally oriented notion introduced in earlier prophetic literatures).<sup>49</sup> Another perennial theme in rabbinical literature that pertains to this idealized messianic age is the notion of the “birth pangs of the messiah.” By this, it was meant that a “catastrophe” (or a degree of “suffering” and “evil” that will make human beings repent) will necessarily occur before the coming of the messiah (or the messianic age). Other rabbinical sages aver, however, that such catastrophes will not necessarily occur since the coming of the messiah will be the result of human beings’ “own continuous improvement” i.e., in their “moral and spiritual progress.”<sup>50</sup> Despite these apparent opposing views on the messianic age, the Jewish peoples’ hope in the coming of the messiah (be it the horizontal or vertical kind)<sup>51</sup> fueled them with “courage to tolerate their humiliations without despising themselves.”<sup>52</sup>

Insofar as Fromm is concerned, the rabbinical tradition in Judaism is in agreement that the messianic age will take place in this world.<sup>53</sup> He sees the messianic age as occurring within history, rather than a break (or rupture) from it. The political situation of the Jews under the Roman Empire largely

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<sup>48</sup> Psychoanalytically speaking, the fixation over clan, family, and nation is symptomatic of what Fromm calls “incestuous ties.” This is a *pathological* form of compensation for the loss of the natural ties with the mother (see earlier discussion on the phenomenon of human birth). The *healthy* form, on the other hand, compensates for this loss by treating each human being as his/her brother and sister—a form that deeply resonates with third *motif* of the messianic age. Cf. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 37–59.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 133. Vertical in the sense that the *messianic* age will be ushered by a “supernatural being who descends from the heavenly heights to *end* history.” Horizontal in the sense that the messianic time is an event that will take place within the temporal-historical horizon.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 140–141.

<sup>51</sup> Later on, these distinctions will be renamed as “prophetic” and “apocalyptic” kinds of messianism respectively.

<sup>52</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 137.

informed their understanding of the messianic age as a symbol of their national independence. In fact, this was demonstrated during the failed uprising of Bar Kohkba (his name literally meaning “Son of a Star”), a Jewish nationalist leader. Kohkba claimed himself to be the messiah—partly due to Rabbi Akiba (who interpreted Kohkba as the “star” being referred to in Numbers 24:17).<sup>54</sup> The Jewish peoples’ strong desire for independence during that time—which coincided with their hopes for a messiah who would liberate them—enabled certain personalities, like Kohkba, to foist themselves as the messiah.<sup>55</sup> This was not uncommon throughout the rest of the rabbinic period, according to Fromm, when the Jews found themselves hoping in a false messiah or messianic time.<sup>56</sup>

This brings Fromm to his final point regarding the *messianic age*—that it should not be *forced*. He avers that the rabbinical literatures have already warned against the idea of “forcing the messiah” (for instance, by calculating the date of when the messianic age will begin). Citing Rabbi Jose, Fromm says “[h]e who attempts to give the end [that is, to predict the coming of the messiah] has no chance in the world to come [strongest expression of censure]” (Megillah 3a).<sup>57</sup> The proper attitude towards the messianic age, according to him, is that of a *dynamic hope*. This hope, which is neither “a passive waiting” nor “rash impatience,” relies upon one to imagine salvation taking place *hic et nunc* but, at the same time, does not expect its fulfillment instantly—that there is always a room for failure and disappointment. Which is why, for Fromm, hope is a *paradox*. To put it poetically, as soon as the messianic age is pronounced, it must be refused. One can imagine and even say something about the messianic age albeit minimally. However, following rabbinic caution, one must refuse any attempts to idealize (or even idolize) it.

Hope, then, does not idolize the future—unlike Robespierre who worshipped “posterity” or Stalin who interpreted the “laws of history” as the sole arbiter of good and evil.<sup>58</sup> A dynamic hope is possible only when one ceases to see future salvation neither as imminent nor distant—but that even if it fails to occur in one’s lifetime, by holding fast to the idea that it will come,

<sup>54</sup> The Book of Numbers 24:17 states “There shall step forth a star out of Jacob ...”

<sup>55</sup> As observed by Schiffman, “strong messianic hopes helped to fuel the fires of the Great Revolt of 66–74 CE and the Bar Kochba uprising of 132–135 CE ... The revolt itself must be seen as primarily restorative, in that it endeavored to re-establish Jewish independence and sovereignty and the freedom to follow the ancestral ways of the Jewish people.” Lawrence Schiffman, “Messianism and Apocalypticism in Rabbinic Texts,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1060.

<sup>56</sup> Another case of false messianic hope that Fromm illustrates was that of Sabbatai Zevi. Like Kohkba, Sabbatai Zevi also claimed himself to be the messiah and preached that the messianic age begins in 1666.

<sup>57</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 153.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* 154–155.

“salvation has already taken place” albeit “in a provisional sense.”<sup>59</sup> This idea of hope, according to Fromm, was beautifully expressed by Rabbi Tarfon in the Mishnah: “[i]t is not up to you to finish the task, but you have also no right to withdraw from it.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Practical Implications: Socio-Historical Transformation and Revolution**

I provided a picture of how Fromm conceived human history as the history of alienation and estrangement, and that the telos or the proper goal of human history is none other than the overcoming of alienation in the messianic age. The initial question for Fromm, however, was whether a “historical revolution”—a transition from human history to the messianic age, from alienation to its overcoming—was possible. Fromm’s quick response to this question was that it is possible, and he uses the Exodus story of liberation to illustrate his point. Fromm also notes how the Israelites struggled for years before they were able to free themselves from slavery. For him, the Israelites’ revolution took steps at a time—it was not brought about by a drastic and forceful change, but by a gradual process facilitated by a prophet of God (hence, the notion of a prophetic messianism).

While Fromm held on to the idea of a messianic age, he was not expressing a kind of optimism that was oblivious to the reality of challenges and failures that may come in trying to usher historical change. Again, the Israelites were a case in point: he narrated how even after they were liberated from the Egyptians, they still fell back to their idolatrous and alienating ways. Which is why, for him, the prophets played a decisive role: they served as the conscience of the people—constantly reminding them of their proper goal (i.e., the messianic age) and providing them with alternatives on how to attain this goal. More importantly, he underscored the role of a dynamic hope in ushering a historical revolution. Again, he did not mean this as an optimistic anticipation of salvation or an idolization of the future. Rather, he meant this as an imagination of salvation taking place here and now but, at the same time, does not expect its fulfillment instantly—that there is always a room for failure and disappointment.

The possibility of a historical revolution he addressed in *You Shall be as Gods* may be used to rebut the optimistic charge against his vision for a messianic age. Just as Fromm understood that the messianic age cannot be forced, one must also understand that transforming society into a better one cannot be done through force. Fromm was aware of the dangers of forcing

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<sup>59</sup> Fromm, *You Shall be as Gods*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

social change, citing historical examples such as Stalin's use of force to advance the socialist vision in Russia—which, for Fromm, succeeded economically but had negative repercussions on the political and cultural spheres of life. It is important to consider this example since Fromm was critical of those who used totalitarian and fascistic means of bringing about the socialist vision—that while he sees prophetic messianism and socialism as proper goals of human history, he was critical of those who try to force this goal upon human beings.<sup>61</sup>

Transforming society, for Fromm, requires an attitude of dynamic hope. In *The Revolution of Hope*, he notes how “[h]ope is a decisive element in any attempt to bring about social change in the direction of greater aliveness, awareness, and reason.”<sup>62</sup> Hope, in this sense, is not about passively waiting for society to change; nor is it about forcing society to change. As Fromm has consistently emphasized: hope is a paradox—an inner state of readiness “at every moment for that which is not yet born, and yet not become desperate if there is no birth in our lifetime.”<sup>63</sup> Hope depends upon seeing the real condition of society, going beyond the façade of public opinion and authoritarian proclivities. This, then, demands the articulation of better alternatives that brings us closer to the aim of a better society. It does not attempt to force the people into changing, rather it simply shows them the possibilities that lie within each alternative—following the prophetic practice of providing the people with alternatives which they can choose from and the consequences of each alternative. As Fromm notes “[p]rophetic language is always the language of alternatives, of choice, and of freedom; it is never that of determinism, for better or worse.”<sup>64</sup> A critique of society then, for Fromm, is not simply satisfied with pointing out the wrong state of things. Critique should likewise provide us with alternatives which bring us closer to the goal of a better society, just as the prophets of old provided alternatives for achieving the messianic age.

## Conclusion

Fromm's prophetic messianism was an offshoot of his radical interpretation of the Old Testament. In his reading of the Old Testament, he was able to come up with his own view of history which may be characterized

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<sup>61</sup> The affinity between prophetic messianism and socialism for Fromm is quite clear in his writings. In *Marx's Concept of Man*, he asserts that “Marx's aim, socialism ... is essentially prophetic Messianism in the language of the nineteenth century.” Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1968), 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

as both teleological and dialectical. The eviction of Adam and Eve from Paradise left human beings in a state of estrangement (the emergence of human beings from their original stage of paradisiacal unity with nature). Human history then, according to Fromm, is nothing but human beings' attempt to overcome this state of estrangement and thus journey towards a new harmony with nature and other human beings (that is, without regressing back into their original ties with nature)—the very idea of a messianic age. Fromm contemplated that the transition from the state of estrangement to the messianic age necessitated a historical “revolution.” This revolution, however, was not to take place by force, but only in steps at a time.

Additionally, for Fromm, the role of the prophets was crucial in bringing about such change in history. The prophets were dissenters; they became symbols of resistance against social injustices. They did not seek to abolish history but, rather, to nudge human beings into the next step in history—that is, the messianic time. The possibility of this taking place, however, lies in the collective power of human beings. The prophets, then, served to constantly remind the people of this social dimension of the messianic age. By guiding the people towards their proper goal as human beings (i.e., the development of their “powers of reason and love, in which [they] become fully human”), the prophets help bring history closer to its *telos*. Lastly, historical change necessitates an attitude of dynamic hope that relies on one to imagine salvation taking place here and now but, at the same time, does not expect its fulfillment instantly, acknowledging that there is always a room for failure and disappointment.

Fromm's philosophy of history, with his notion of prophetic messianism at its core, articulates a vision of historical progress that acknowledges its eschatological origins while affirming human agency in ushering historical change. Fromm's grounding in Jewish scriptures and Rabbinical literature provides crucial resources that distinguish his messianism from “catastrophic” or “apocalyptic” accounts of the messianic age. Where apocalyptic messianism sees a total break from the present, Fromm's prophetic vision recognizes continuity between present struggles and future possibilities. His interpretation of the Israelites' Exodus narrative demonstrates how historical change emerges from sustained engagement with existing conditions rather than their wholesale destruction.

In his psychoanalytic practice, Fromm emphasized the importance of having a “picture” or “model of a patient—a theoretical understanding of human nature itself.”<sup>65</sup> This model presents the human being as fundamentally

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<sup>65</sup> Erich Fromm, “Being Centrally Related to the Person,” in *The Clinical Erich Fromm: Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*, ed. by Rainer Funk (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2009), 30.

conflicted: existing simultaneously as a being in nature and as a being capable of transcending nature. This existential contradiction creates an internal tension that demands resolution. The therapeutic process, therefore, seeks to help individuals find ways to unify these conflicting conditions and overcome their inherent discord. Analogously, in his philosophy of history, human history represents humanity's collective attempt to overcome alienation and achieve unity. However, this historical quest for unity cannot involve regression to a pre-conscious, paradisiacal state. Instead, drawing from rabbinical and scriptural tradition, Fromm locates the goal of this historical process in the messianic age—a future state of unity where humanity overcomes alienation.

Next to having a theoretical picture of a human being, for Fromm, is to try and determine the “chances for a profound change” in an individual.<sup>66</sup> Here, I would like to draw a parallel theme in *You Shall be as Gods*, where he inquired into the possibility of a “revolution” or “historical change” within the context of the Israelites’ history of liberation. Just as profound change in an individual cannot be expected within the initial stages of therapy, one cannot expect social-historical transformation to take place overnight. As Fromm constantly emphasized, historical revolution could only succeed in steps at a time. Through prophetic messianism, Fromm articulated his vision of a historical revolution that neither forces nor passively await social change. Rather, one must dynamically hope for such change to take place within the horizon of present. Fromm's understanding of hope as a paradox—maintaining readiness “for that which is not yet born” while avoiding desperation—provides crucial guidance for navigating contemporary crises that demand both realistic assessment and transformative vision. His prophetic messianism thus offers not merely historical insight, but a practical framework for engaging present challenges with both critical clarity and constructive hope.

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<sup>66</sup> Fromm, “Being Centrally Related to the Person,” 30.

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## Order as a Technology of Power: From Colonial Urbanism to Algorithmic Surveillance in Smart Cities

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*Vladan Klement*

**Abstract:** This article examines how the Western philosophical ideal of order, which is shaped from antiquity through the medieval “*esse est ordo*” to modern rationalism, was projected into colonialism and reappears in contemporary surveillance regimes in smart cities. Using a conceptual-genealogical approach, I analyze three layers: 1) the emergence of the order/chaos dichotomy in Western metaphysics, where order becomes an ontologically and morally superior category; 2) the way in which French colonial urbanism materialized this dichotomy—for example, by interpreting Muslim cities as “chaotic” and transforming them into controllable and disciplinary spaces; and 3) the current digital transformation of this ideal within smart city infrastructures, which, through Big Data and algorithmic governmentality, create an environment of permanent prediction and categorization. I show that today’s technological regimes are not just a new form of surveillance but a continuation of the same epistemic project that previously legitimized colonialism. The digital “order” is not a neutral technical goal but a normative framework that creates new forms of moral and political dominance, particularly through the categorization of “others” and the normalization of controllability as an ideal of urban life.

**Keywords:** algorithmic governmentality, colonial urbanism, surveillance, urban rationality

Over the past two decades, urban surveillance has become one of the main tools of governance in Western cities. In the discourse of “smart cities,” this transformation is often described as a technologically neutral process aimed at increasing efficiency and security. However, critical literature shows that smart city infrastructures are deeply political: they transform how residents are recognized and how the boundaries of legitimate

behavior are defined.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, debates on surveillance repeatedly return to the question of whether a “balance” can be found between security and freedom—a debate that Mark Neocleous challenges by showing that security has always been prioritized over freedom in the liberal tradition.<sup>2</sup>

This article assumes that smart city surveillance cannot be adequately understood solely as a technological innovation or as a continuation of security policy. It is another historical phase of a much older rational and metaphysical orientation of Western thought, which emphasizes order as an ontological and epistemic principle. From ancient philosophy through medieval theology to modern rationalism, Western tradition has been shaped by the idea that to be is to be ordered (“*esse est ordo*”) and that chaos (as “*tohu-bohu*” before the creation of the world) represents a negative pole that must be overcome.<sup>3</sup> This logocentric orientation<sup>4</sup> is not only evident at the level of philosophical concepts but is also gradually permeating the way urban space is organized.

To demonstrate this connection, the article traces the genealogy of the ideal of order in three steps. First, through primary sources, I reconstruct how the motif of order and its opposition to chaos was formed in Western philosophy: from Plato’s cosmology through Aristotelian teleology, medieval “*esse est ordo*” to the modern conception of reason as a method. Second, I then show how this concept of order materialized in French colonial urbanism: in the Orientalist depiction of “chaotic” Islamic cities,<sup>5</sup> in the rationalization of streets and neighborhoods,<sup>6</sup> and in the disregard for culturally specific spatial

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<sup>1</sup> See Rob Kitchin, “The Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science,” in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 374 (2016); Maroš Krivý, “Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism: The Smart City and the Society of Control,” in *Planning Theory*, 17 (2016); Ayona Datta and Nancy Odendaal, “Smart Cities and the Banality of Power,” in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37 (2019).

<sup>2</sup> See Mark Neocleous, “Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance: Towards a Critique of Security Politics,” in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 6 (2007).

<sup>3</sup> See Alexandru Giuculescu, “Order versus Chaos or the Ghost of Indeterminacy,” in *The Paideia Archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, 37 (1998); Hermann Krings, “Das Sein und die Ordnung. Eine Skizze zur Ontologie des Mittelalters,” in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 18 (1940); Ivan Blecha, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Olomouc: Olomouc Publishing House, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See Andrew Belsey, “Chaos and Order, Environment and Anarchy,” in *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 36 (1994); Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als widersacher der Seele*, Vol. 1, (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1929); Jacques Derrida and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Linguistics and Grammatology,” in *SubStance*, 4 (Autumn 1974).

<sup>5</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977); Capitaine Villot, *Mœurs, costumes et institutions des indigènes de l’Algérie* (Paris: Béguin, 1983); Xavier de Planhol, *The World of Islam* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> See Ambe J. Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands* (Cham: Springer, 2016); Jean Dethier, “Evolution of Concepts of Housing, Urbanism, and Country Planning in a Developing Country: Morocco, 1900–1972,” in *From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near Eastern City*, ed. by L. Carl Brown (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1973).

rationalities, as documented, for example, by Pétonnet.<sup>7</sup> Finally, I connect this genealogy with today's smart city regimes of surveillance and algorithmic governmentality, which translate the ideal of order into the language of data, security, and prediction.<sup>8</sup>

The research question of the article is: How is the philosophical ideal of order in the Western tradition reflected in colonial urbanism and further in contemporary smart city regimes of surveillance, and what are the normative consequences of this reflection for urban life?

The text's original contribution lies in its linking of the level of metaphysical genealogy (order, *logos*, rationality), colonial urban practices, and contemporary algorithmic governmentality. Unlike most studies of smart cities, which focus on technical infrastructure or legal aspects,<sup>9</sup> here I trace the continuity of one specific concept (order) across these layers. I show that smart city surveillance is not just another step in technological development but a digitized continuation of the same rationality that legitimized the colonial transformation of "chaotic" cities and that still structures the security imagination of Western societies today.

## Methodological Approach

The text is conceived as a conceptual-genealogical study, not as empirical research in the sense of sociological investigation or discursive analysis of a large data corpus. The aim is not to provide a representative description of smart city projects or colonial cities but to observe how a certain philosophical ideal (order) is projected into various historical configurations of power and space.

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<sup>7</sup> See Colette Pétonnet, "Espace, distance et dimension dans une société musulmane: à propos du bidonville marocain de Douar Doum à Rabat," in *L'homme*, 12 (1972).

<sup>8</sup> See Antoinette Rouvroy, Thomas Berns, and Liz Carey-Libbrecht, "Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation: Disparateness as a Precondition for Individuation through Relationships?," in *Réseaux*, 177 (2013); Richard Weiskopf and Hans Kause Hansen, "Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics: Examples from 'People Analytics'," in *Human Relations*, 76 (2023); Andrea Pavoni and Simone Tulumello, "What Is Urban Violence?," in *Progress in Human Geography*, 44 (2020); Pete Fussey and Jon Coaffee, "Urban Spaces of Surveillance," in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, ed. by Kirstie Ball, Kevin Haggerty, and David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2012); Marikken Wulf-Wathne, "The Utopian Logics of 'Smart Stockholm': Visibility, Predictability, and Controllability," in *Cities*, 146 (2024).

<sup>9</sup> See Kitchin, "Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science"; Isadora Neroni Rezende, "Facial Recognition in Police Hands: Assessing the 'Clearview Case' from a European Perspective," in *New Journal of European Criminal Law*, 11 (2020); Privacy International, *The UK's Privatised Migration Surveillance Regime: A Rough Guide for Civil Society* (London: Privacy International, 2021).

Methodologically, I proceed as follows: First, I conduct a close reading of primary philosophical texts (Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, etc.) and reconstruct how the motifs of order, *logos*, and opposition to chaos function in them.<sup>10</sup> Second, I rely on a genealogical interpretation of colonial sources and secondary literature, especially works on French urbanism in North Africa and its Orientalist framework.<sup>11</sup> Third, I analyze selected contemporary examples of smart city surveillance and legislative or technological regimes: Kinalisoft software, the case of audiosurveillance in Orléans, “major events” legislation in France, the deployment of algorithmic surveillance during the Olympic Games in Paris. I place them within the framework of critical studies of surveillance, algorithmic governmentality, and security policies.<sup>12</sup>

I understand empirical “examples” as exemplary cases, not as a statistically representative sample. Their task is to demonstrate how the abstract concept of order translates into specific spatial arrangements and technological interventions. The epistemic status of the article is therefore interpretative: it is not about testing hypotheses but about developing a consistent conceptual trajectory that links metaphysical assumptions with colonial and algorithmic practice.

At the same time, I reflect on the limits of this approach. The analysis is based mainly on French European material and remains within the framework of Western archives of texts and cases; it does not provide a systematic comparison with other colonial contexts or a detailed ethnography of contemporary smart cities. The results should therefore be understood as

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<sup>10</sup> See Stephen Menn, “Aristotle and Plato on God as *Nous* and as the Good,” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992); Peter Slater, “Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine,” in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992); James Brent, “God and Order in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Acta Philosophica*, 25 (2016); Louis E. Loeb, “The Priority of Reason in Descartes,” in *The Philosophical Review*, 99 (1990); Giuculescu, “Order versus Chaos.”

<sup>11</sup> See Said, *Orientalism*; Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*; Dethier, “Evolution of Concepts of Housing”; Michelle Lamprakos, “Le Corbusier and Algiers: The Plan Obus as Colonial Urbanism,” in *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise*, ed. by Nezar AlSayyad (London: Routledge, 1992); Pétonnet, “Espace, distance et dimension”; Capitaine Villot, *Mœurs*; de Planhol, *World of Islam*.

<sup>12</sup> See Kitchin, “Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science”; Steven Feldstein, *The Global Expansion of AI Surveillance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019); Fussey and Coaffee, “Urban Spaces of Surveillance”; Weiskopf and Hansen, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics”; Pavoni and Tulumello, “What Is Urban Violence?”; Marie-Helen Maras, “The Social Consequences of a Mass Surveillance Measure: What Happens When We Become the ‘Others’?,” in *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 40 (2012); Tatiana Lysova, “Video Surveillance and Public Space: Surveillance Society vs. Security State,” in *What People Leave Behind: Marks, Traces, Footprints and their Relevance to Knowledge Society*, ed. by Francesca Comunello, Fabrizio Martire, and Lorenzo Sabetta (Cham: Springer, 2022).

offering a conceptual framework that can be tested and expanded in various empirical situations in the future.

## Key Terms

### *Order, Chaos, Anarchy*

I use the terms “order” and “chaos” in line with the philosophical tradition that understands order as a condition for the possibility of being, knowledge, and justice.<sup>13</sup> Chaos here is not an empirical state but the conceptual opposite of order—that which cannot be captured by categories, mapped, or subjected to teleology. The term “anarchy” often appears in colonial and smart city discourse, which is not identical to chaos<sup>14</sup> but in political language it is often used as a synonym for disorder. In this article, I work with these concepts as they function in the analyzed discourses: as labels for what deviates from the Western ideal of order and can therefore be declared a deficit, a danger, or a target for intervention.

### *Logocentrism and Rationality*

The concept of logocentrism<sup>15</sup> refers to the orientation of European culture towards *logos*—reason, order. In this article, logocentrism does mean broader ontological stance according to which what is real and valuable is that which is orderly and subject to rational control. This attitude is also reflected in urban imagination, where visually perceptible order is understood as a reflection of a deeper physical and social order.<sup>16</sup>

### *Smart City*

In line with critical literature, I understand a smart city not as a neutral “smart” infrastructure but as a data-saturated environment in which the lives of residents become a continuous flow of “lively data”<sup>17</sup> and where

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<sup>13</sup> See Giuculescu, “Order versus Chaos”; Krings, “Das Sein und die Ordnung”; Brent, “God and Order in Thomas Aquinas.”

<sup>14</sup> See Benjamin Tucker, “Socialism: What It Is,” in *Instead of a Book by a Man Too Busy to Write One: A Fragmentary Exposition of Philosophical Anarchism* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker, 1897); Hisham Abusaada and Abeer Elshater, “From Chaos to Order: Articulating the Urban Policies for Cities of Hardship,” in *Industrial and Urban Growth Policies at the Sub-National, National, and Global Levels* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> See Blecha, *Philosophical Dictionary*; Klages, *Der Geist*; Derrida and Spivak, “Linguistics and Grammatology.”

<sup>16</sup> See Abusaada and Elshater, “From Chaos to Order.”

<sup>17</sup> See Deborah Lupton, *The Quantified Self* (London: Wiley, 2016).

infrastructures generate “real-time, fine-grained and actionable data” about processes and the population.<sup>18</sup> In these cities, predictability and controllability are among the main goals.<sup>19</sup> The term “smart city” in this article does not refer to every instance of surveillance but to configurations in which technological and political interests converge in a project of total knowledge and control of the city.

### *Surveillance and Algorithmic Governmentality*

I understand surveillance, in a broad sense, as a set of practices for collecting, sorting, and using information about people and spaces to control behavior.<sup>20</sup> I pay particular attention to algorithmic governmentality<sup>21</sup> in which subjects are reduced to “dividuals,” i.e., data fragments that are predicted and intervened upon before the subject can reflect or act.<sup>22</sup> Following Weiskopf and Hansen,<sup>23</sup> I understand this regime as the creation of an environment in which the space for ethics narrows: action is increasingly pre-structured by algorithmic classifications and “nudge” mechanisms.

### **Philosophical Excursus of Order**

In this article, I show how one of the dominant currents of Western philosophy—the current emphasizing the central role of reason and order— influenced not only theoretical thinking but also the shape of cities. I focus on the line of European rationalism that placed reason and its order on a symbolic pedestal, which, I argue, later provided a strong “intellectual argument” for colonial powers in evaluating and rebuilding “conquered” territories. It is no coincidence that France, the “land of philosophers” and heir to Enlightenment rationality, used this argument with such intensity in its colonial urbanism.

The aim of this section is not to present a complete history of Western philosophy but to select some representative examples (an illustrative sample of many) that show how deeply Western tradition is imbued with rationality

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<sup>18</sup> See Kitchin, “Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science.”

<sup>19</sup> See Krivý, “Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism”; Wulf-Wathne, “Utopian Logics of ‘Smart Stockholm’.”

<sup>20</sup> See Fussey and Coaffee, “Urban Spaces of Surveillance”; Privacy International, *UK’s Privatised Migration Surveillance Regime*.

<sup>21</sup> See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in *October*, 59 (Winter 1992), 3–7.

<sup>23</sup> See Weiskopf and Hansen, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics.”

and the opposition of order to chaos. Western philosophy is literally full of such authors.

The order/chaos dichotomy has been present since the beginning of European thought.<sup>24</sup> The Pythagoreans did not regard the world as a product of chance or disorder: numbers, ratios, and geometry were understood as principles of cosmic order standing above any empirical or formless chaos.<sup>25</sup> This thread intensified in Plato, whose Demiurge imposes *kosmos* upon pre-existent chaotic matter: chaos being passive; order, active and divine.<sup>26</sup> Plotinus likewise conceived the Highest Good as complete order from which lower levels of being emerge through successive degradations: the less order, the closer one moves toward chaos.<sup>27</sup> Aristotle extended this tradition by identifying order with the very structure of being itself: nature aims toward a *télos*, ordered entities exhibit “true being,” and deviations approach disorder, which he associated with ugliness. He also claimed, for example, that the main forms of beauty are order and symmetry.<sup>28</sup> In this context, chaos functions as a pre-ontological state of *tohu-bohu*, existing only as the conceptual opposite of order.<sup>29</sup> The tension between order and chaos can already be seen in the pre-Socratics, whose opposing doctrines—Parmenides’s unchanging unity of Being and Heraclitus’s perpetual flux—established a foundational dialectic that shaped the entire trajectory of Western thought.<sup>30</sup> Plato’s theory of Forms then codified this dialectic by situating perfect, eternal order beyond the sensible world, with reason as the only faculty capable of transcending the instability and chaos of the sensible world and grasping true reality.<sup>31</sup> Even politically active authors such as Marcus Aurelius emphasized that *Logos* (divine reason) is a universal order that permeates the cosmos. Chaos is human misunderstanding or resistance to order.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Boethius held the view that philosophy comforts us with the idea that the world has an order that transcends even visible evil. Chaos is an illusion; order is the divine plan.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Belsey, “Chaos and Order.”

<sup>25</sup> Pythagoras, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library: An Anthology of Ancient Writings Which Relate to Pythagoras and Pythagorean Philosophy*, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1987), 22, 46, and 93.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 28b.

<sup>27</sup> Plotinus, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 4, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (London: George Bell and Sons, 1918), 1049 and 1152.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1076a.

<sup>29</sup> Giuculescu, “Order versus Chaos,” 89.

<sup>30</sup> See Daniel W. Graham, “Heraclitus and Parmenides,” in *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos*, ed. by Victor Caston and Daniel W. Graham (London: Routledge 2017).

<sup>31</sup> See Menn, “Aristotle and Plato on God.”

<sup>32</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (London: Penguin, 2015), 28.

<sup>33</sup> Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), 81.

In the Middle Ages, this tradition merged with Christian theology: Augustine emphasized the transcendent order of divine law,<sup>34</sup> and Thomas Aquinas systematized it by positing that everything in creation has an order given by God. Chaos is not an independent force but a lack of order – *privatio boni*.<sup>35</sup> This is also where the famous “*esse est ordo*” – to be is to be in order – originates.<sup>36</sup> Order is not an attribute but a condition of existence. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment shifted rationality to the center of epistemology. For example, René Descartes rejected the “disordered” chaos of the senses and tradition, while his method emphasized clarity and order.<sup>37</sup> Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” places the conscious, rational self in the role of the organizing principle of the world.<sup>38</sup> This logic can also be found in modern philosophy: According to Immanuel Kant, human reason does not arise solely from sensory data; rather, it actively organizes this data using *a priori* forms of perception (space and time) and *a priori* categories (e.g., causality), so that experience itself is only possible when sensory “chaotic” material is structured by rational categories.<sup>39</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling then spoke of the “standing together of beings as a whole” and of “extreme discord” (great disunity/disorder), which must be overcome or incorporated into order.<sup>40</sup> Modern/contemporary critics have summarized this tradition as logocentrism. European cultures have always oriented towards *logos*: order and reason. *Logos* is not just a tool but an ontological principle of understanding reality. This attitude has shaped science, theology, politics, and art.<sup>41</sup> In urbanism, it manifests itself in the belief that the visible order reflects a deeper physical or social order.<sup>42</sup>

It is, of course, true that Western philosophy is neither homogeneous nor unilaterally rationalistic; current Western philosophers have rejected or deconstructed order. However, this does not change the fact that the duality of order and chaos is one of its enduring motifs, which has direct cultural and political consequences. In the following discussion, I show how this philosophical emphasis on order served as an intellectual legitimization of colonial urbanism. Above all, I show how the same logic is returning in today’s Western cities, now through surveillance technologies that demand a

<sup>34</sup> Slater, “Goodness as Order and Harmony in Augustine,” 153.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 25, a. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Giuculescu, “Order versus Chaos”; Krings, “Das Sein und die Ordnung,” 89.

<sup>37</sup> René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method* (Aladdin Book Company, 1901), 35.

<sup>38</sup> Loeb, “Priority of Reason in Descartes,” 7.

<sup>39</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 261.

<sup>40</sup> F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>41</sup> See Belsey, “Chaos and Order.”

<sup>42</sup> Abusaada and Elshater, “From Chaos to Order,” 43.

standardized and controllable environment. The logic of order thus serves once again as a framework for justifying interference in urban space and the actions of its inhabitants.

### Order in Colonial Thought

French colonial power (and by no means only French) entered new territories with the ambition of consolidating control and dominance. This project was structured around the dichotomy of “us” and “them,” “reason and order” versus “irrationality and chaos.” The reconstruction of urban structures was not presented as an act of subjugation but as an elevation of the supposed chaos of the natives to the Western idea of order. It was a gesture of “*mission civilisatrice*,”<sup>43</sup> which Edward Said described as the pinnacle of Orientalist self-confidence: the West is rational, logical, and value-based, while the Orient is none of these things.<sup>44</sup> A fixed binary is thus established in the Orientalist tradition: the West embodies order, rationality, and stability, while the Orient is portrayed as a place of disorder, irrationality, and cultural backwardness. This dichotomous framing serves as an epistemic and moral justification for interventions intended to remedy the alleged “disorder.”

Ambe J. Njoh shows that this logic is deeply rooted in the Western modernizing ethos, which has become associated with industrialization and rationalization as a legacy of the Enlightenment. According to him, modernity was based on “the power of reason over ignorance, order over disorder, and science over superstition.”<sup>45</sup> In this perspective, anarchy or chaos is not understood as an alternative form of organization but as the ontological opposite of order. Although the concepts of anarchy and chaos are not identical,<sup>46</sup> in this text, I use them as they function in colonial discourse: as labels for that which deviates from the Western idea of rationality. What is essential is who claims epistemic primacy and who is placed in the role of the “irrational.”

Colonial material from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries confirms this logic. Capitaine Villot described North African cities as disorderly masses of houses without regular design.<sup>47</sup> A century later, de Planhol claimed that “the most striking feature of Islamic cities is irregularity

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<sup>43</sup> See Matthew Burrows, “‘Mission Civilisatrice’: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860–1914,” in *The Historical Journal*, 29 (1986).

<sup>44</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> See Tucker, “Socialism”; Abusaada and Elshater, “From Chaos to Order.”

<sup>47</sup> See Capitaine Villot, *Mæurs*.

and anarchy” and that Islam leads to the negation of urban order.<sup>48</sup> From today’s perspective, it is clear that these statements do not characterize Arab cities, but rather the observer’s perspective: where the colonizer was unable to recognize “his” order, he declared the existing logic of space to be chaos. This interpretation conceals a deep Eurocentrism—the belief that only Western tradition is the bearer of rational thinking.

Michelle Lamprakos, therefore, accurately captures the difference between Western and Muslim urban forms: in the Muslim tradition, order often takes place within houses and courtyards rather than in open spaces, which can appear opaque.<sup>49</sup> Europeans often mistook this cultural difference for a lack of structure, which, in turn, reinforced the idea of their own civilizational superiority.

This framework was not merely intellectual; it became the basis of colonial policy. As Njoh notes, the civilizing mission was based on the belief in the necessity of “acculturating racial and cultural others.”<sup>50</sup> In this logic, the city becomes a moral laboratory through which the population can be “educated” and the European order imposed on it. The narrow, winding streets of medinas and kasbahs were seen as spatial obstacles to discipline and therefore had to be replaced by transparency, clarity, and straight lines: in other words, urban order as an instrument of power.

For this reason, the French colonial authorities systematically promoted rectangular grids, wide boulevards, and the separation of European and Indigenous neighborhoods. Rectangular streets allowed the colonial army to monitor several kilometers of space from a single point.<sup>51</sup> Europeans lived in modern neighborhoods equipped with infrastructure, while the Indigenous population was placed under the supervision of the police and army.<sup>52</sup> Urbanism thus became a material interface of inequality.

This trend continued into the 20th century. Le Corbusier’s Plan Obus for Algiers represented an extreme form of modernist “redemption” of the city through monumentality, geometry, and functional separation. His design ignored the sociocultural structure of Algiers and reproduced the logic of colonial dominance, which Lamprakos describes as “anchored in modern European values.”<sup>53</sup> Although the plan for Algiers was not implemented, the modernist reorganization of the cities in French Morocco did become a

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<sup>48</sup> See de Planhol, *World of Islam*.

<sup>49</sup> See Lamprakos, “Le Corbusier and Algiers.”

<sup>50</sup> Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, viii.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>53</sup> Lamprakos, “Le Corbusier and Algiers,” 185.

reality.<sup>54</sup> Jean Dethier sums up this approach succinctly: “delicacy was abandoned in the fight against urban chaos,” and the traditional street was “banished in the name of progress.”<sup>55</sup>

This rationalization of colonial space not only fulfilled an aesthetic ideal but also functioned as what Michel Foucault calls, in connection with his analysis of the panopticon, the automatic functioning of power. The straight boulevards and clear grids of French urbanism are not only a tool of military surveillance but also create a space in which surveillance becomes permanent in its effects, even if it is not continual in its execution.<sup>56</sup> At this point, the metaphysical principle of *esse est ordo* is transformed into a technical apparatus: order is no longer just a goal but a machine that automates the obedience of the population without the need for constant physical violence. This transition from the material discipline of colonial space to the digital fluidity of the smart city can be theoretically interpreted through Gilles Deleuze’s diagnosis of the end of “enclosed societies.”<sup>57</sup> While colonial urbanism operated according to the logic of the “mole” (the construction of solid structures and enclosed spaces [enclosures]), today’s digital surveillance is more reminiscent of the movement of a “snake,” whose complex loops replace the fixed corridors of the disciplinary molehill.<sup>58</sup>

### Colonial Order and Cultural Rationalities of Space

Colette Pétonnet’s ethnographic study of the Moroccan bidonville Douar Doum<sup>59</sup> shows that even environments that arise without formal planning have their own culturally rooted spatial rationality. Winding paths, multifunctional rooms, an emphasis on intimacy, and patios are not signs of chaos but of a different concept of order that works with situational orientation, flexible time, and collective living.

Colonial urban planners often interpreted this cultural structure as disorganization because it was based on the European ideal of linear, transparent, and functionally divided space. However, Pétonnet shows that feelings of overcrowding or “disorder” do not arise from density or poverty but from the disruption of cultural boundaries and intimacy. Europeans were

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<sup>54</sup> I am not mentioning Moroccan cities here by chance. Part of my broader research focuses on French colonial urbanism and its influence on Moroccan cities, and I am also interested in so-called Arab urbanism, whose manifestations I observe in Moroccan cities.

<sup>55</sup> Dethier, “Evolution of Concept of Housing,” 215 and 221.

<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 201.

<sup>57</sup> See Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

<sup>59</sup> See Pétonnet. “Espace, distance et dimension.”

not faced with an absence of order but with a different type of order: one that their own epistemic framework was unable to recognize.

This contradiction confirms that colonial urbanism was not merely a technical project but a clash between two different spatial ontologies. European rationality, presented as a universal norm, delegitimized culturally specific forms of organizing life. It is precisely this dynamic—the suppression of alternative spatial orders in the name of a single “rational” model—that reappears in contemporary smart surveillance technologies, where algorithmic systems once again construct a narrow norm of urban order through data classifications and predictions.

### **Critical Debates on Smart Cities and Algorithmic Governmentality**

The current debate on smart cities and algorithmic governance provides a framework for grasping more precisely how the philosophical logic of “order” translates into contemporary urban management technologies. A fundamental starting point is the extensive tradition of critical security studies, which shows that modern Western political rationality prioritizes security over freedom. Neocleous, for example, shows that classical liberalism systematically subsumed freedom under the logic of security and that the so-called “liberal balance” between freedom and security never existed; security was “always the real political trump card.”<sup>60</sup> This genealogy of security is relevant because the same logic of “order/security” continues in today’s smart cities, now institutionalized through data surveillance infrastructures and algorithmic prediction.

A similar trajectory is also described in critical texts on smart cities, which emphasize that the digitization of cities leads to the emergence of “data landscapes” in which the lives of residents become a constant flow of “lively data”<sup>61</sup> and are continually subjected to prediction and classification. As Rob Kitchin points out, smart city infrastructures produce “vast deluges of real-time, fine-grained and actionable data” about city processes and residents, making the population “continuously measurable, predictable, and correctable.”<sup>62</sup> This shift is not only technological but epistemological: algorithms establish a new configuration of truth where power operates from within opaque, hidden processes,<sup>63</sup> and their decisions acquire the status of

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<sup>60</sup> Neocleous, “Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance,” 144–145.

<sup>61</sup> See Lupton, *Quantified Self*, 42–45.

<sup>62</sup> Kitchin, “Ethics of Smart Cities and Urban Science,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> See Frank Pasquale, *The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms that Control Money and Information* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

objectivity and rationality<sup>64</sup> even though their evaluations and classifications are political and value-laden.

In this context, the framework of algorithmic governmentality developed by Antoinette Rouvroy, Thomas Berns, and Liz Carey-Libbrecht<sup>65</sup> is fundamental. Algorithmic governance reduces subjects to “dividuals”<sup>66</sup>: data fragments that are sorted and used for predictive interventions even before the individual can act or reflect.

According to Richard Weiskopf and Hans Kause Hansen, this regime is characterized by three elements: 1) objectification, reducing subjects to data packages; 2) disconnection of human reflexivity from the categorization process; and 3) new modes of subjectivation that bypass the subject’s autonomy and “nudge” them toward desired behavior.<sup>67</sup> These three elements form the core of closure of the space of ethics—an algorithmic environment that is incapable of addressing people as moral subjects, thereby closing off the space for ethical action.

From the perspective of the genealogy of urban order, algorithmic governmentality represents a digitized continuation of the same rationality that previously legitimized colonial urbanism and its disciplinary spaces. In Deleuzian terminology, there is a fundamental epistemic shift: from the “molds” that fixed the colonial city into clear grids to “modulation.”<sup>68</sup> While the colonial planner sought to create a permanent mold of space, the smart city order “modulates” in real time: creating a self-forming system that constantly changes the parameters of control according to the movement of residents.<sup>69</sup> This regime definitively reduces subjects to “dividuals”:<sup>70</sup> data fragments, samples, and codes (such as passwords) that replace the integrity of the person and enable predictive intervention even before the subject begins to act. Digital infrastructures thus fulfill Félix Guattari’s vision of a city in which the movement of inhabitants is controlled by a central computer that, based on universal modulation, opens or denies access to urban functions.<sup>71</sup> Algorithmic systems today, like colonial administration, interpret social complexity as a domain of knowledge and immediately classify any deviation from the model of order as an anomaly requiring correction.

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<sup>64</sup> See Bernhard Rieder, “Big Data and the Paradox of Diversity,” in *Digital Culture & Society*, 2 (2016).

<sup>65</sup> See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*.

<sup>66</sup> See Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

<sup>67</sup> Weiskopf and Hansen, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics,” 497–498.

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

The inclusion of these debates is also crucial to the relationship between smart city narratives and the atmospheres of security that Andrea Pavoni and Simone Tulumello criticize. In their genealogy of urban violence,<sup>72</sup> they show that modern security narratives create “atmospheres of fear” and produce an urban order that is a direct heir to colonial regimes of power and repression. Discourses of smart cities, which promise “cities without violence” through predictive security technologies, reproduce a logic in which violence is externalized and associated with certain groups of residents, while the real structural causes of inequalities and risks remain unaddressed. This criticism strongly intersects with the genealogical argument of my study: urban order is not neutral but a historically layered project that, from colonialism to algorithmic monitoring, understands urban dwellers as objects of risk and intervention.

Introducing these authors and concepts into the debate clarifies that smart city surveillance is not just a “new version of surveillance.” Rather, it represents a new phase of rationality in which the ideal of order—from classical liberalism, to colonial urban rationality, to today’s algorithmic performativity—is fully automated. Algorithmic governance does exactly what the genealogy of order expects: the world is to be governed according to a model of predictable patterns, and deviations are to be identified and corrected as quickly as possible. This continuity connects the philosophical concept of order to today’s smart cities.

Integrating these debates clarifies that my contribution lies not in describing smart surveillance technologies per se but in showing how they extend a much older rationality of order—a point largely absent from existing smart city literature.

### **Smart Cities, Surveillance, and the Contemporary Logic of Order**

The examples given in the previous section show that linking morality to references to “reason” and “order” has a long and problematic genealogy. Colonial logic worked with the opposition of order and chaos, rationality and irrationality, control and unpredictability. The contemporary smart city adopts this opposition in technological form. For digital surveillance to function, urban space must be measurable and stable; it must take the form of an environment that can be predicted and categorized. When urban structures are designed to accommodate technological needs, the same epistemic hierarchy that legitimized colonial interventions is reproduced: “order” is presented as morally unquestionable, while anything that deviates from it is seen as a problem to be corrected.

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<sup>72</sup> See Pavoni and Tulumello, “What Is Urban Violence?”

Domination in urban space is not a new phenomenon. What is new are the means: states that no longer have colonial territories, instead have technologies that allow them to control their own populations with unprecedented efficiency. Since the 1990s, image quality, camera sensitivity, and remote access capabilities have improved dramatically,<sup>73</sup> and the advent of artificial intelligence represents another fundamental leap forward.<sup>74</sup> Biometric and behavioral systems now operate in real time, categorizing bodies and behaviors and combining identification with instant analysis.

A particularly telling example is the Czech software Kinalisoft. The system identifies individuals by their gait with 99.2% accuracy, even when individuals try to change their walking style. A few steps are enough for a person to be recognized without any contact or sensors. The creator of the technology legitimizes its use by arguing that “we live in dangerous times”<sup>75</sup>: a classic framework that pits security against freedom and assumes that threats are omnipresent and require discipline.

A similar tension is evident in the case of Orléans, where the city council, in collaboration with Sensivic, wanted to install street microphones. It claimed that the devices only picked up “air vibrations.” However, the court correctly stated that microphones connected to cameras “collect information relating to individuals” and, in the absence of legal support, banned the system. Deputy Mayor Montillot’s response that the technology “saves lives” once again shows how easy it is to moralize about the technological expansion of state power.<sup>76</sup>

History shows where such technologies can lead. IBM identification systems played a key role in the Nazi classification of the population into categories designated for persecution.<sup>77</sup> The Czechoslovak communist secret police, in turn, created “pink lists” of homosexuals as a tool of social control.<sup>78</sup> If these regimes had had access to current algorithms, their ability to monitor,

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<sup>73</sup> See Levente Tóth, “The Evolution of Public Surveillance Systems in Europe,” in *Magyar Rendészet*, 23 (2023).

<sup>74</sup> See Feldstein, *Global Expansion of AI Surveillance*.

<sup>75</sup> Jon Cartwright, “CCTV Software Identifies People by Their Walk,” in *Horizon* (9 February 2016), <<https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/horizon-magazine/cctv-software-identifies-people-their-walk>>.

<sup>76</sup> La Quadrature du Net, “Première victoire contre l’audiosurveillance algorithmique devant la justice” (17 July 2024), <<https://www.laquadrature.net/2024/07/17/premiere-victoire-contre-laudiosurveillance-algorithmique-devant-la-justice>>.

<sup>77</sup> See Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation* (Washington, DC: Dialog Press, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> See Dominika Chudárková, “Obraz lesbické zkušenosti v prózách českých autorek po roce 1989” (PhD Dissertation: Masaryk University, Czech Republic, 2011); Michal Pitoňák, “Sexuální orientace jako přehlížená proměnná: terminologická, metodologická a kontextuální úskalí v otázce měření sexuality v rámci „reprezentativních“ šetření. Platí stále 4%?” in *Československá Psychologie*, 65 (2021).

segregate, and eliminate “undesirable” groups would have been incomparably more effective. Warnings from the past cannot therefore be separated from the present: even democratic states can, in times of crisis or political shift, use technology in ways that exceed legal and moral limits.

This is confirmed by the broader context of “homeland security,” where, as Pete Fussey and Jon Coaffee show, military-industrial structures, IT corporations, and police apparatuses are merging into a “surveillance-industrial complex.”<sup>79</sup> Here, technologies are not neutral tools but carriers of a certain political ontology in which the city is understood as a problem of optimization and its inhabitants as sets of risk parameters. In this sense, the smart city fulfills Krivý’s diagnosis: technologies are not mere infrastructure but a means of enforcing a certain kind of rationality<sup>80</sup>—one that requires the city to be legible, calculable, and disciplined.<sup>81</sup> This logic has concrete social implications. Surveillance has historically been applied unevenly, leading to targeted surveillance of certain groups and the retroactive production of statistical evidence that further legitimizes this inequality.<sup>82</sup> Artificial intelligence does not overcome these tendencies but reinforces them: algorithms adopt the racial and social biases contained in the training data.<sup>83</sup> It is therefore a technological extension of existing structures of inequality.

Surveillance also influences behavior itself: it leads to self-censorship, suppresses spontaneity, and normalizes the idea that public space is a permanent arena of evaluation.<sup>84</sup> As Maras shows, mass surveillance blurs the distinction between “us” and “them”—everyone becomes a potential suspect.<sup>85</sup> This changes the fundamental relationship between citizens and the state: mistrust is built into the infrastructure of everyday life.

This dynamic was particularly visible during the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, where the state deployed drones, QR codes, algorithmic video analysis, and a massive police presence, under the 2016 “major events” legal category. According to La Quadrature du Net,<sup>86</sup> this legislation opens

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<sup>79</sup> See Ben Hayes, “The Surveillance-Industrial Complex,” in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*.

<sup>80</sup> See Krivý, “Towards a Critique of Cybernetic Urbanism.”

<sup>81</sup> See Wullf-Wathne, “Utopian Logics of ‘Smart Stockholm’.”

<sup>82</sup> Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*, 5.

<sup>83</sup> See Caya Carter, “Technoracism: The Inherent Racism Within AI and How It Affects People of Color” (PhD Dissertation: Elizabeth City State University, USA, 2023); Anupam Chander, “The Racist Algorithm?,” in *Michigan Law Review*, 115 (2017), 1023; Nelson Colón Vargas, “Exploiting the Margin: How Capitalism Fuels AI at the Expense of Minoritized Groups,” in *AI and Ethics*, 5 (2025).

<sup>84</sup> See Lysova, “Video Surveillance and Public Space.”

<sup>85</sup> See Maras, “Social Consequences of a Mass Surveillance Measure.”

<sup>86</sup> La Quadrature du Net, “Jeux olympiques: Fichage de masse et discrimination politique (30 July 2024), <<https://www.laquadrature.net/2024/07/30/jeux-olympiques-fichage-de-masse-et-discrimination-politique>>.

the door to the normalization of exceptional measures and tests the limits of the rule of law. At a time of growing authoritarian and populist tendencies, the risk of abuse of these legal and technological possibilities is considerable.

In summary, the genealogy of order, colonialism, and contemporary technological surveillance shows remarkable continuity. Digital infrastructures are not value-neutral innovations; they embody a certain form of power that has historically legitimized interventions in spaces labeled as “chaotic” or “problematic.” Today’s smart city is thus not merely a technical project but a continuation of long-term efforts to make urban life predictable, controllable, and normatively structured — often at the expense of democratic ambiguity.

## Discussion

The genealogy presented in this article shows the continuity between the metaphysical ideal of order, colonial urban planning practices, and contemporary smart city surveillance regimes. First, the motif of order is understood in Western tradition as ontologically and morally superior to chaos: from the medieval *esse est ordo* to modern rationalism. This framework also structured colonialism, in which European elites interpreted cities in North Africa as “chaotic” and therefore in need of correction. However, as it was shown, these environments had their own culturally specific forms of order that the colonial gaze failed to read.

Second, today’s smart city infrastructure does not disrupt this logic but rather translates it into digital form. Smart cities create data-saturated environments in which residents are continuously categorized as model deviations or risks. Algorithmic governmentality thus narrows the space for ethics and replaces reflection with predictive intervention. What was a material reorganization of the street in colonial urbanism is now a digital reorganization of subjects.

Third, the security discourse that legitimizes these technologies corresponds to Neocleous’s critique of the liberal idea of “balancing” security and freedom: security is always primary. Current examples as gait recognition, audiosurveillance in Orléans, and the legal regime of “major events” show how easily technological expansion can be morally justified.

Fourth, like colonialism, smart city surveillance is selective. The uneven focus on certain groups, historically evident from colonial segregation to IBM identification systems or the StB’s “pink lists,” is today reproduced by algorithms trained on data burdened with social and racial biases. Thus, “order” becomes not only a technical norm but also a tool of social categorization.

Finally, mass surveillance transforms the urban experience itself: it leads to self-censorship, erodes trust, and turns everyone into a potential suspect. Combined with the techno-security paradigm, this creates a city of optimization rather than plurality.

This analysis shows that what is at stake is not only the scope of technology but the very form of urban life: whether it will be based on controllability or on the acceptance of ambiguity and unpredictability as legitimate elements of urbanity.

## Conclusion

The article showed that current smart city surveillance regimes cannot be understood in isolation from the long history of Western thinking about order. From metaphysical ideas about cosmic order, to the theological claim *esse est ordo*, to modernist projects of colonial urbanism, the same motif recurs: to be rational means to be orderly, predictable, and controllable. In colonial cities, this ideal was transformed into a spatial practice that privileged rectangular grids, transparency, and segregation, while obscuring and delegitimizing other forms of order existing in medinas, kasbahs, and bidonvilles.<sup>87</sup>

Contemporary smart cities do not disrupt this logic but rather intensify it through digital infrastructures. Algorithmic governmentality translates the ideal of order into the language of data, models, and predictions: residents become individuals whose actions are continuously classified and corrected.<sup>88</sup> The security discourse that legitimizes these technologies builds on a long tradition of prioritizing security over freedom<sup>89</sup> and exploits historical and current fears to extend surveillance into ever new areas—from “the fight against terrorism” to “major events” like the Olympic Games.

The genealogical perspective, therefore, shifts the debate on smart cities beyond the classic “freedom versus security” dilemma. It shows that what is at stake is not only the degree of surveillance but also the very understanding of the city and its inhabitants: whether the city is primarily a space of pluralistic and unpredictable life or an object of optimization in which only what is known and controllable in advance has a place. The greatest risk of the current techno-security rationality is not only the misuse

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<sup>87</sup> See Said, *Orientalism*; Njoh, *French Urbanism in Foreign Lands*; Pétonnet, “Espace, distance et dimension”; Dethier, “Evolution of Concepts of Housing, Urbanism, and Country Planning.”

<sup>88</sup> See Rouvroy, Berns, and Carey-Libbrecht, *Algorithmic Governmentality and Prospects of Emancipation*; Weiskopf and Hansen, “Algorithmic Governmentality and the Space of Ethics.”

<sup>89</sup> See Neocleous, “Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance.”

of specific technologies but also the gradual normalization of an ontology in which anything that deviates from models of order is perceived as a problem to be prevented.

The text does not offer a simple “counter-recipe” but suggests several directions for further reflection. On the one hand, it is necessary to systematically highlight and take seriously alternative spatial rationalities that are not based on transparency and prediction—as shown, for example, by anthropological work on Douar Doum.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, it is necessary to develop critical analyses of the specific technical and legal regimes that enable smart city infrastructures and assess them not only according to narrow security criteria but also with regard to how they affect the possibility of political dissent and urban otherness. Finally, it is important to consider forms of urban and technological practice that do not repeat the colonizing gesture of “bringing order” but rather allow for a certain degree of ambiguity and unpredictability as constitutive parts of the city.

If the city is to remain a place where new forms of life, politics, and social relations can emerge, we must question the assumption that a “good city” must above all be perfectly organized. However, this genealogy reveals the flip side of the problem: a specific form of the “tragedy of the commons” in urban space. Surveillance and technological structuring of order are not just manifestations of an abstract will to power; they often arise as a legitimate, albeit problematic, response to the abuse of urban freedom by “bad actors.”

This is where a key paradox arises: in response to this abuse, urban design “tenses up” and, through its protective tendencies, begins to drastically restrict the movement and spontaneity of all its inhabitants. The result is a city that is easy to control and manage, but which becomes internally rigid. The real challenge for future “smart cities” is therefore not to optimize surveillance technology but to strike a balance between the necessary degree of order and the constitutive unpredictability of urban life.

However, this need for reevaluation opens the way to a deeper conceptual shift: from the logic of control to the paradigm of caring for possibility (*soin du possible*). Contemporary planning, dominated by “immune rationality,”<sup>91</sup> strives to extend immunity to infinity and attempts to isolate the city from risk, uncertainty, and otherness. However, if the city is to be politically and aesthetically alive again, it must be de-immunized: it must learn to accept vulnerability and difference not as a threat but as a fundamental condition of communal life.

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<sup>90</sup> See Pétonnet, “Espace, distance et dimension.”

<sup>91</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären III. Schäume* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

## 170 ORDER AS A TECHNOLOGY OF POWER

Future directions of research, therefore, suggest abandoning technocratic efforts for purity and unity in favor of the aesthetics of relationality and care understood as the art of presence. Following ontological theory of not-yet,<sup>92</sup> anarchist theory of place,<sup>93</sup> and the ethics of care,<sup>94</sup> planning can be rethought not as the enforcement of closed visions but as the role of a playful suggestor who cultivates intervals for unpredictable forms of being. The future of urban life thus does not depend on the transformation of protection into total control but on the courage to transform planning into an open framework of hope, where care becomes a condition of freedom.

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<sup>92</sup> See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> See Olympia Tvetter, *Anarchist Urban Planning & Place Theory*, <<http://www.anarchistplanner.org/articles/AUP-for-reading.pdf>>.

<sup>94</sup> See Jean-Philippe Pierron, "Ce que l'architecture fait au soin et inversement," in *Rhizome*, 84 (2023); Raphaël Boscarato, "Architecture thérapeutique : Prendre soin plutôt que soigner" (Master's Thesis: École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland, 2022).

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## Connecting Robber Zhi with Zhuangzian Primitivism

*Luke Ellis Blong*

**Abstract:** Welsh sinologist Angus Charles Graham identified Chapters 8–11 of the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) as having a sole author, a ‘Primitivist’, advocating for a stateless, agrarian society. These chapters are of prime interest to scholars searching for Daoist and consequently primitivist accounts of *xing* (性). Commonly translated as human nature, *xing* expresses the processes of growth and natural dispositions of a living thing. Employing Esther Klein’s identification of a possible “Core *Zhuangzi*” containing Chapters 10 and 29, conflicting accounts of *xing* which emerge from the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* could be reconciled. These chapters reference the notorious bandit leader Robber Zhi (盜跖), and this paper argues that an examination of references to Robber Zhi in the *Zhuangzi* yields a connection between Chapters 8, 10, 11, and 29, which describe *xing* as the easiest or most natural spontaneous course of development. These chapters present a cohesive account for the preservation of *xing* and rejection of essentializing moralism which seeks to codify the means of bringing human *xing* under order. The Zhuangzian perspective elucidated by the examination of Zhi considers such moralizing efforts highly noxious to *xing* and even life itself.

**Keywords:** Zhi (盜跖), *Zhuangzi* (莊子), Daoist primitivism, *xing* (性),

This BCE) in presents a study of the character of Robber Zhi (盜跖), a notorious bandit leader from the Spring and Autumn period (c. 770–c. 481 BCE) in the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) and his relation to a Daoist philosophy of protecting *xing* (性).<sup>1</sup> Commonly translated as human nature, *xing* expresses the processes of growth and natural dispositions of a living

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Han dynasty, the term was rarely distinguished from a similar term life or growth, *sheng* (盛). When the two became distinguished, at the time of the 4th century BCE, the Yangist school developed the term *xing* with reference to the proper course of a thing’s development or process of life. For more information on *xing*, see Angus Charles Graham, “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature,” in *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, 6 (1967).

thing. I understand *xing* to be something akin to the easiest or most natural development of a given thing or person, which can be arrested or altered by external influence. References to *xing* within the *Zhuangzi* (莊子) are only present in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters. Following the assessment of Welsh sinologist Angus Charles Graham, the author or authors of Chapters 8–11 of the *Zhuangzi* are known by convention as primitivists. While Zhi appears in the primitivist Chapter 10, he serves as the mouthpiece of Yang Zhu (楊朱; 440–c.360 BC) in Chapter 29. In this regard, he is used to speak not only for the primitivists but also the Yangists.

The literature on Daoist primitivism focuses on identifying an account of *xing* within the *Zhuangzi*. Robber Zhi is consistently used in apparently incongruous comparisons with more esteemed moral exemplars to identify pernicious elements of codified moral systems and their deleterious effects upon *xing*. The juxtaposition of the reviled Zhi and notable Confucian worthies points to an epistemic complaint about the moralists,<sup>2</sup> which belies their complete misunderstanding of *xing* and an overreach in presuming to know whether it is good or bad or how it must be correctly cultivated. The Zhuangzian perspective on the matter is that codifying moral standards according to the pretense of knowing what is right or wrong brings harm to everyone and disorders their *xing*. Nothing other than the spontaneous and uninterrupted development of one's *xing* is what is "best" for it.

In this article, I will rely on Richard John Lynn's translation of the *Zhuangzi* and Guo Xiang's (郭象; 252–312 BCE) commentaries,<sup>3</sup> as well as Brook Ziporyn's *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*.<sup>4</sup> The article is divided into six sections, beginning with a review of the literature focusing mostly on debates in English-language scholarship about *xing* in the *Zhuangzi*, as well as the question of their authorship. Certain chapters highlighted by Esther Klein as constitutive of the *Zhuangzi* that 2nd-century historian Sima Qian (司馬遷) had access to are identified.<sup>5</sup> Next, I examine the comparison of

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<sup>2</sup> These are Confucians and Mohists and in some cases even Yangists. The label "moralist" is chosen to denote these schools' efforts to define and implement a unified ethical and political order based on traditional morals. For more on the dynamics of this period, see Angus Charles Graham (trans.), *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2001), 197–198.

<sup>3</sup> Richard John Lynn (trans.), *Zhuangzi: A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted by Guo Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Brook Ziporyn (trans.), *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> These chapters also conform closely with the biography of Zhuang Zhou (莊周; c. 369–286 BCE), who is credited with authorship of the *Zhuangzi* featured in Sima Qian's *Shiji* (史記 or *Records of the Grand Historian*, 91 BCE). For more details, see Esther Klein, "Were There 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*," in *T'oung Pao*, 96 (2010).

Robber Zhi with the historical figure Bo Yi (伯夷; c. 1046 BCE) in Chapter 8, which identifies the *Zhuangzi* as strongly valuing preservation of one's *xing* over all else. Following this, the depiction of Robber Zhi in Chapter 10 is considered, noting how the *Zhuangzi* frames its rejection of arbitrary notions of right and wrong because they empower coercive action through moral disputation and benefit robbers.

The article next turns to Chapter 11 to examine how Zhi is used there to denounce moralist disciplinary systems like Confucianism, which encourage people to abandon their *xing*. Proceeding from this, Chapter 29 is shown to repudiate sagely wisdom as hypocritical pretext for robbery and violence with a shocking contrast between Zhi and Confucius. Finally, the article concludes that whoever the author or authors of these allegedly "Core Chapters" of the *Zhuangzi* may have been, the undercurrent that unifies their thought is that one should not abandon one's *xing* to emulate a moral exemplar or otherwise submit to the moral discipline strongly associated with the wisdom of the sages. A Zhuangzian understanding of *xing* criticizes most moralist epistemic assumptions, lampooning sagely wisdom with thought-provoking comparisons to Robber Zhi which demonstrate how harmful attempts to codify or shape *xing* are.

### Connecting *Xing* and Questions of Authorship in the *Zhuangzi*

This section seeks to parse the scholarly discourse on *xing* and bring close attention to the disputed attribution of authorship of the chapters in *Zhuangzi* stemming from the work of Graham. It observes how Esther Klein's essay, titled "Were There 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States? A New Examination of Evidence about the *Zhuangzi*," identifies several chapters of a possible "Core *Zhuangzi*," with Chapters 10 and 29 referencing Robber Zhi. Robber Zhi is relevant for each of the different authorship theories, and this section identifies that the chapters which reference Zhi—Chapters 8, 10, 11 and 29—should be examined for a cohesive Zhuangzian account of *xing*.

Graham, in his translation and analysis of the *Zhuangzi* in *Disputers of the Tao*<sup>6</sup> and later reiterated in *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters*,<sup>7</sup> categorized the *Zhuangzi* chapters based upon authorship. The primitivists and the Yangists are responsible for the four chapters in this study. Graham's decision to label the author of the Outer Chapters "primitivist" is because these chapters reference the agrarian and stateless society of the Shen-Nong (神農) paradigm. Taking its name from the mythological figure Shen-Nong, known as the father of agriculture, the Shen-Nong paradigm is characterized by an

<sup>6</sup> Angus Charles Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Open Court, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> See Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters*.

ideal albeit technologically and administratively limited agrarian society, hence the name “primitivist.”

Deriving the name of their school from Yang Zhu, the Yangists believe keeping one’s nature intact, preserving *xing*, and not allowing oneself to be subdued by worldly affairs.<sup>8</sup> For the Yangists, *xing* is the capacity to live out the term of life which heaven has destined, though it may be injured or degraded by exterior influences. The objective of life for a Yangist thinker would be to keep one’s *xing* intact, so it is noteworthy that the primitivist chapters reference Yang Zhu. The ostensibly Yangist author of Chapter 29 uses Zhi to denounce everything that followed from the golden age at the very roots of Confucian historiography, before the prehistoric sage kings Yao (尧) and Shun (帝舜) (c. 24th century BCE). This refers to the very same paradigm of Shen-Nong exhorted by the primitivist author, indicating some overlap in their beliefs. This overlap and the shared use of the character Robber Zhi point to a shared concept of *xing*.

Scholarship on the matter since Graham has departed significantly from his construal of the *Zhuangzi*. The most significant challenges to Graham’s model are represented by Liu Xiaogan and Esther Klein. Rather than use the primitivist label, Liu labels the author of those chapters “anarchist.”<sup>9</sup> These chapters indicate belief in a designated sovereign—an emperor with innumerable tiny fiefs, each of which effectively attends to the needs of its residents such that they feel no need to leave. This is not necessarily an anarchist arrangement.

Klein emphasizes a deviation from Graham’s argument that elements of stylistic difference and disparities of sophistication<sup>10</sup> between the Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous Chapters delineate separate authorship<sup>11</sup> and a clear break in the date of composition. Klein argues that Sima Qian (c. 145 BC–c. 86 BC) likely recognized something like a “Core *Zhuangzi*,” a subset of chapters that would most likely include parts of Chapters 28, 29, and 31, as well as possibly parts of Chapters 10, 14, 17, and 23. Noting how Chapters 10

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–55.

<sup>9</sup> See Liu Xiaogan, *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Klein argues a variety of textual parallels between the *Zhuangzi*, and other pre-Han and early Han texts justify reclassification of the *Zhuangzi* according to sub-chapter divisions. For more, see Klein, “Were There ‘Inner Chapters’ in the Warring States?”

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Dejun argues in parallel with Ren Jiyu that the seven Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* are not works that represent Zhuang Zhou’s thoughts but have their origins in the Huang-Lao School of the early Western Han Dynasty. For more, see Zhang Dejun, “Is the Inner Chapter of ‘Zhuangzi’ Written by Someone from the Early Western Han Dynasty?,” in *Zhuangzi Philosophy Discussion Collection* (Zhonghua Book Company, 1962). As well as Ren Jiyu, “Exploring the Origins of Zhuangzi – From the Materialist Zhuang Zhou to the Idealistic ‘Late Zhuangist School’,” in *Zhuangzi Philosophy Discussion Collection* (Zhonghua Book Company, 1962).

and 29 both reference Robber Zhi, and how Zhi is relevant both to Graham's primitivist and Yangist authors as well as the "Core *Zhuangzi*" that Klein outlines, I am strongly inclined to develop a syncretic reading of the text with an emphasis on Zhi.

Additionally, Harold D. Roth and Dan Robins both contend that the author of the Outer Chapters was not one sole primitivist.<sup>12</sup> While "primitivist" has come to designate a subgenre of Daoist studies loosely called "Daoist primitivism," some scholars<sup>13</sup> claim *Zhuangzi* as Confucian or associate it with a more proto-communist interpretation.<sup>14</sup> I argue that close attention to Zhi's use across these chapters may present a coherent account of *xing* which accommodates the primitivist position as well as incorporating Yangist elements from Graham while conforming with Klein's scholarship and Graham's assertion that the political polemics in these chapters are responding to the revival of the moralist schools like Confucianism sometime during the Chu-Han Contention from 206 to 202 BCE.

The rest of this section documents disparate accounts of *xing* in the *Zhuangzi*. Frank Saunders and Chiu Wai Wai each indicate that there is no unified single notion of *xing* to be found in the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, but several. Saunders finds "three distinct approaches to human nature, which in turn serve as the foundation of their political and ethical thoughts."<sup>15</sup> Saunders explains that Zhuangzian primitivism centralizes around the idea that cultural artifice erodes *xing*. Chiu argues that the tensions within the *Zhuangzi* with regard to defining *xing* establish an underlying theme that one should resist parochial and rigid methods of establishing norms whatsoever.<sup>16</sup> These are both primitivist and Yangist points.

Divergent accounts about *xing* throughout the text seem to convey a message of non-intervention in other people's *xing*. Jacob Bender argues that

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<sup>12</sup> See Harold David Roth, *A Companion to Angus C. Graham's Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003). See also Dan Robins, "The Debate over Human Nature in Warring States China" (PhD Thesis: The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Yang Rubin and Chen Guying have instead situated *Zhuangzi* within the humanist tradition of Confucianism itself instead of a subgenre of Daoism. For more in-depth treatment of this issue, see Yang Rubin, *Zhuangzi in Confucianism* (Taipei: Lian Jing Publishing Co., Ltd., 2016). See also Chen Guying, *The Humanist Spirit of Daoism*, ed. by David Jones and Sarah Flavel, trans. by Hans-Georg Moeller (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> For more on this, please see Ren Jiyu, "Exploring the Origins of Zhuangzi." See also, Ren Jiyu, "The Course of Development of the History of Chinese Philosophy," in *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, 41 (2010).

<sup>15</sup> Frank Saunders Jr., "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*: An Introduction," in *Philosophy Compass*, 15 (2020), 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Chiu Wai Wai, "The Debate over *Xing* in the Outer Chapters of the *Zhuangzi*," in *Dao*, 21 (2022).

the *Zhuangzi* is talking about alienation from nature when it comes to *xing* in the Outer Chapters.<sup>17</sup> Chong Kim-chong argues that the Outer Chapters eschew evaluations of right or wrong and refuse to give an account of *xing*. Chong points to the stakes of the *xing* debate; the supremacy of particular normative systems—Confucian or Mohist. This appears to strike at the heart of the issue for the authors of this era. He argues, “the social and ethical norms espoused by the Confucians and Mohists were themselves a part of the problem,”<sup>18</sup> and that when explaining the complexities of *Zhuangzi*’s stories, “there may often not be any ethical or moral solution to a state of affairs, no matter which system of norms prevails or is appealed to.”<sup>19</sup> One current emerges across these different interpretations; a normative moral system is more troublesome than not, and this is both a Yangist and primitivist position.

Reinforcing this, Hans-Georg Moeller writes that early Chinese philosophers were preoccupied with defining order and identifying the means by which to achieve it or otherwise avoid disorder.<sup>20</sup> The *xing* discourse can be understood in relation to this philosophical proclivity, and I believe the Zhuangzian position on *xing* calls into doubt the epistemic overreach of the moralists to claim that their provisos for cultivating *xing* were universal. Realizing this, the authors proposed a philosophy of preserving *xing* and resisting attempts to codify or interfere in its development, presenting the primitivist Shen-Nong paradigm as a sociopolitical alternative.

This section has sketched the landscape of the scholarly discourse on the authorship of the Miscellaneous and Outer Chapters as well as the landscape of secondary literature on Daoist primitivism, which seeks to identify a Zhuangzian account of *xing*. Connecting Graham’s accounts of the ‘Primitivist’ and Yangists with the notion of a “Core *Zhuangzi*” suggests that a Zhuangzian account of *xing* may be found in Chapters 10 and 29. The similarities between the different references to Zhi across the Chapters featuring him—8, 10, 11, and 29—present a synthesis of both primitivist and Yangist views in a distinctive Zhuangzian account of *xing*. The following section begins outlining the Zhuangzian account of *xing*, starting with Zhi’s appearance in Chapter 8.

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<sup>17</sup> See Jacob Bender, “Alienation and Attunement in the *Zhuangzi*,” in *Sophia*, 62 (2023).

<sup>18</sup> See Chong Kim-chong, “Zhuangzi and the Issue of Human Nature,” in *Dao*, 22 (2023).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> See Hans-Georg Moeller, “Gangster Zhi: Comedic Daoist Philosophical Practice,” in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 50 (2023).

### Webbed Toes: The Extraneous and Arbitrary

This section centers on the comparison between Robber Zhi and Bo Yi made in Chapter 8 of the *Zhuangzi* and its relation a Daoist philosophy of protecting or cultivating *xing*. The rest of the chapter is considered in context of this observation, highlighting the dangers to one's *xing* which may result from the overvaluation of conventional wisdom. Rather than claiming that people's *xing* is inherently good or bad, this chapter explains that *xing* should be left alone and that good and bad are arbitrary, conforming in part with Saunders, Chiu, Bender, and Chong to different degrees.

The *Zhuangzi* explores the danger of arbitrary moral exemplars by juxtaposing two figures. The first, Bo Yi (伯夷) (c. 1046 BCE), is generally heralded to be an example of a great man, and he is a celebrated figure in the Confucian literary tradition. The second is Robber Zhi. The author explains that Bo Yi valued honor more than his own life, while Robber Zhi valued riches:

Bo Yi died in pursuit of fame at the foot of Mt. Shouyang, while Robber Zhi died in pursuit of profit at the top of Mt. Dongling. They died for different things, but they were alike in damaging their lives and harming their inborn natures. So why must we say that Bo Yi was right and Robber Zhi was wrong? Everyone in the world is sacrificing himself for something or other.<sup>21</sup>

Guo Xiang explains that since the result is the same, whether this sacrifice ought to be considered noble or condemnable does not warrant our consideration.<sup>22</sup> Saunders explains that the primitivists insisted that, while according to their own custom people like Bo Yi believed they are living fulfilling human lives, "their cultural fetishes leave them blind to the harmful reality of their situation, in which their *xing* is utterly ruined, and yet they consider themselves to be flourishing."<sup>23</sup> It is because of the normative standards that people are tricked into believing that what Bo Yi did is considered superior behavior while despite having the same result, Zhi's self-sacrifice is considered petty.

The *Zhuangzi* asks the reader to note that because there is sacrifice and loss of life in each case, this judgment regarding who should be esteemed or condemned is an arbitrary one. The *Zhuangzi* continues:

<sup>21</sup> Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Saunders, "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*," 5.

Those who do so [self-sacrifice] for Humanity and Responsibility [仁義 *renyi*]<sup>24</sup> are praised by the vulgar as exemplary men, while those who do so for wealth are condemned as petty men. But they are all alike in sacrificing themselves. So are there really any such things as “exemplary men” and “petty men”? In that they damage their lives and harm their inborn natures, Robber Zhi is no different from Bo Yi. Why should one be praised and the other condemned?” So to subordinate your inborn nature to Humanity and Responsibility, even if you succeed like Zeng and Shi, is not what I call good.<sup>25</sup>

The truth of the matter is that both Robber Zhi and Bo Yi each destroyed their lives for the sake of something superfluous to their natures. A Yangist would argue that one’s life is never considered commensurate in value with anything else, so sacrificing oneself for the sake of something like *renyi* is a terrible waste. Chiu elaborates, “It is always the case that things’ *xing* differ, so they develop into a variety of shapes, functions, and dispositions. In short, the enforcement of rigid standards inevitably violates things’ *xing*.”<sup>26</sup> Things like *renyi* do not represent what is best for everyone; to the Zhuangzian perspective, they are neither descriptive or constitutive of *xing* for all people nor the means of developing it.

Specifically, the overvaluation of conventional morality, such as the ideals exhibited by exemplars of *renyi*, pose significant danger to one’s *xing*, tempting one to abandon it for rewards like honor and esteem. The eponymous “Webbed Toes,” which the title of Chapter 8 refers to, are like those qualities in that they are totally superfluous to one’s *xing*. Expounding, Chiu states, “Social norms create pain and suppression precisely because they are external to people’s *xing*, regardless of whether they succeed in stabilizing society.”<sup>27</sup> *Renyi* are a lot like having extra fingers or webbing between one’s toes: not only are these unnecessary developments in the first place, once they are fully developed they feel as necessary and as much a part of oneself as webbed toes or extra fingers.<sup>28</sup> Like extra fingers, they are also painful to dispose of and subsequently live without once one has become accustomed

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<sup>24</sup> Ziporyn uses Humanity and Responsibility as the translation for *renyi* (仁義) here although it is also commonly translated as Benevolence and Righteousness.

<sup>25</sup> Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> Chiu, “The Debate over *Xing*,” 554.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>28</sup> Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 308–309.

to living with them. Once these norms are adopted in a place or internalized in a person, they are very hard to remove without doing harm.

Bo Yi alienated himself from his *xing* which ended his life prematurely. Bender notes how the behavior of both men “damages how they are naturally predisposed to the world” and the author of this chapter is explicit that neither man should be considered a role model.<sup>29</sup> Trying to emulate either man would be against one’s own *xing*, and one should desire to be oneself. Echoing this, Ziporyn writes that “the original human nature is here regarded as prior to the distinction between good and evil but ultimately, if left to itself and undisturbed by interfering ‘ideals’ of goodness, is a higher source of Good.”<sup>30</sup> This is the main primitivist point; alienation from that prior human nature predisposes us to act coercively, making others conform to society and particular notions of right or wrong which are situated in particular perspectives.

Highlighting this tension, the author of the chapter points to the 5th-century Confucian role models Zeng Shen (曾參) and Shi Yu (史魚) because they encouraged the whole kingdom to abandon their *xing*.<sup>31</sup> This might have been quite taboo for, as Bender identifies, the “most unusual claim in Chapter 8 is the accusation that the ‘sage’s’ are just as responsible for social ills as the ‘robbers’ and ‘thieves’.”<sup>32</sup> In an initially apparently incongruous comparison, Zhi turns out to be far less malicious than Zeng and Shi when harm to *xing* is considered. As Chong writes, the “sages who instituted *renyi* and *liyue* destroyed the ‘constant nature’ (*chang xing* 常性) of people” while by comparison Zhi is merely a bandit.<sup>33</sup> Even if one tries to lead a good or morally upright life according to convention, the *Zhuangzi* argues that abandoning one’s *xing* can cause tremendous harm.

In summary, from a Zhuangzian perspective, attempts to conform with external moral systems guarantee harm to one’s *xing*. While successful conformity with *renyi* and the standards of the sages might be valued by society, any rewards one receives are worthless compared to the cost to life of losing one’s *xing*. The author of this section further criticizes these systems of right and wrong by deploying Zhi in an apparently incongruous comparison with Bo Yi as well as with the sagely architects responsible for it. In the process, the chapter demonstrates that such people and their conventions are hardly any less responsible for harm than Robber Zhi. The

<sup>29</sup> Bender, “Alienation and Attunement in the *Zhuangzi*,” 180.

<sup>30</sup> Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> Zeng Shen (曾參) refers to Zengzi (曾子), a disciple of Confucius who would later teach the grandson of Confucius, who was in turn the teacher of Mencius. Shi Yu 史魚 (also written Shi Qiu 史鱗) was a historiographer and patrician of Wei (魏) mentioned in *Analects* 15:7 as a moral paragon.

<sup>32</sup> Bender, “Alienation and Attunement in the *Zhuangzi*,” 180.

<sup>33</sup> Chong, “Zhuangzi and the Issue of Human Nature,” 242.

following section echoes this point about the danger to *xing* and the hypocrisy of the conventions established by sagely wisdom.

### Chests, States, Sages, and Thieves

This section shows that Chapter 10 of the *Zhuangzi* exhorts the reader to disentangle themselves from common sense wisdom. Like the webbed toes chapter, the author's clear focus in Chapter 10 is on presenting and countervailing the conventional understanding of what is good. Robber Zhi and another notorious thief Tian Chengzi (田成子) are used to demonstrate that the commonsense wisdom, or the "sagely wisdom," (聖知之法)<sup>34</sup> and the regulations and norms established by it are of greater assistance to the great thieves than it is to anyone else.

The Zhuangzian perspective emphasizes great similarity between robbers and sages, suggesting that the cultural artifice which enables their antics and erodes human *xing* should be discarded. The *Zhuangzi* claims that a good man cannot stand without the *dao* of the sage, but Robber Zhi cannot operate without it either. While Zhi's virtues are not the five Confucian virtues in verbatim, this shows that Robber Zhi is adroit at using the "wisdom of the sages" for the purposes of moral disputation. He benefits from the wisdom and laws of the sages: they increase his profits and give him the ability to act with impunity.

The chapter argues this by way of satire, targeting social convention and sagely wisdom, highlighting how they seem clever on the surface but are deeply unhelpful or, at worst, augment great thieves. The chapter begins:

To protect your trunks, your sacks, your cabinets from thieves who would break into them, rifle through them, bust them open, no doubt you will bind them with seals and ropes, secure them with latches and locks. This is what the conventional world calls wisdom (知/*zhi*).<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, the rigorous securing of one's possessions does not actually stop thieves. In fact, it only makes it easier for greater thieves to walk off with loot. A small thief may be deterred by strong locks and chains, but a great thief is simply going to pick up the chest and haul it off in its entirety. At that moment, the thief's main concern is that the locks are strong enough

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<sup>34</sup> Refer to *Daodejing* Chapters 16, 19, 20, 38, and 55 for how this "sagely wisdom" or sagely regulations are a misappropriation of the wisdom of the sages and misunderstanding of the *dao*.

<sup>35</sup> Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, 62.

to keep all the loot safe while it is hauled away. The teachings of the sages are very much like these locks and chains which are used to secure chests.

On this model, the chests are likened to states. According to conventional wisdom, one would imagine that moral principles—such as *renyi* and the teachings of the sages—are there to protect the state, but in reality, they only make it much easier for great thieves to seize it. The main concern of such a great thief is that these moral principles successfully shield him from the repercussions of his theft and preserve the fruits of his looting. The *Zhuangzi* says that safeguarding the state with things like *renyi* is in truth only safeguarding it for someone else to take. The example provided is the theft of the state of Qi by Tian Chengzi in 481 BCE during the Spring and Autumn Period.

Qi was a prosperous state regulated by the rules of the sages. One day, Tian Chengzi had the ruler of Qi killed and usurped his position as the head of state. What Tian Chengzi stole in doing so was not simply the state, but what the *Zhuangzi* calls the “laws and regulations devised by the sagely wisdom.”<sup>36</sup> He was able to live just as securely in his position as the original sage-kings Yao and Shun despite his blatant skullduggery. Rather than preventing crime, the author of this chapter states that laws and property only serve to protect people with enough wealth and power to break those rules. The legal and moral order, as well as their corresponding social institutions, are organized to only support the wealthy and powerful. In this regard, the author of the chapter argues that what convention considers the acme of wit is nothing more than preparing a carefully wrapped gift basket for the next great thief.

All the things that Zhi steals, such as jade and pearls, are only artificially valued so highly, and the same is true of the state stolen by Tian Chengzi. The *Zhuangzi* argues that if sages were eliminated and their wisdom forgotten, and if jade and pearls were destroyed and discarded, there simply would not be anything to enable, protect, or indulge great thieves. This forgetting implies a return to the Shen-Nong paradigm, and Saunders notes that this is an important primitivist point: “the ideal society for the primitivists is one in which people are wholly satisfied with having only their basic necessities met, without corruption by the sages and their cultural trappings.”<sup>37</sup> He explains that this sort of natural spontaneous flourishing, characteristic of a plain people living in accordance with their *xing*, is only possible “without moral education, an invasive ruler, or a strict set of explicit norms and rituals,” in other words, without the wisdom of the sages.<sup>38</sup> This is core to the primitivist argument, as without grand states and esteemed

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Saunders, “Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*,” 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

courts there would be nothing for people like Tian Chengzi to seize and no competition for moral renown or the luxuries of courtly appointments.

This section has aimed to demonstrate that the rejection of sagely wisdom coincides with a Zhuangzian doctrine of preserving *xing*. Chapter 10 of the *Zhuangzi* exhorts the reader to recognize that even though the conventions of sagely wisdom may believe themselves to be well-intentioned in their aim to order society and protect it and the people from harm, the very artifice which supports this project are most invaluable to great thieves. Zhi was used here in conjunction with Tian Chengzi to explore how sagely norms empower and defend the worst sorts of people.

### Against Codification: Letting Things and *Xing* Be

The following section examines Chapter 11 of the *Zhuangzi*, which draws on Zhi once again to reinforce arguments found in the preceding chapters. Robber Zhi is compared directly with sagely worthies Zeng and Shi to demonstrate that sagely wisdom endangers one's *xing* and produces coercion and strife. This echoes the Zhuangzian account advanced by the previous sections of this article about preserving and protecting *xing* by abandoning codified moral systems.

Robber Zhi is deployed in Chapter 11 to emphasize that trying to emulate other people, even good ones, is harmful to one's nature. These people may be esteemed, but they have different *xing*—to uncritically emulate their behavior is to try and copy their *xing* rather than following one's own. Not only this, but the competition for recognition and moral accolades brings people into conflict. And like Chapter 10, which was discussed in the previous section, such a system produces bandits and tyrants. The author laments:

I am not so sure that sagely wisdom is not the yoke for cangues and benevolence and righteousness are not the mortise and tenon for shackles. And how do I know that Zeng and Shi are not whistling signal arrows for Jie and Robber Zhi! Therefore I say, abandon sagemess and discard wisdom, for then the whole world will find great and perfect order.<sup>39</sup>

Moral conditioning of this sort draws people away from their *xing*, whether by discipline (as with shackles) or by temptation. In a coercive system based on sagely wisdom, people like Zeng and Shi may arise, but

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<sup>39</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 213–214.

these conditions just as easily create folks like Robber Zhi. This is because not only do people compete to be rewarded and dement their *xing* in the process, but those adroit at moral disputation can secure these rewards through what amounts to theft. In that way, Zeng and Shi are whistling arrows for the likes of the notorious tyrant Jie (桀; 1728–1675 BCE) of the Xia dynasty<sup>40</sup> and Robber Zhi. With the Xia as a template for organizing society according to sagely wisdom, the fact that these moral teachings produced Jie (and the corresponding immiseration of society) should be considered a complete condemnation of the whole system according to a Zhuangzian account of *xing*.

In speaking of the primitivists in the first two sections of this chapter, Chiu explains, “Their discourses revolve around two themes: first, preserving people’s inborn *xing* and preventing it from being injured by cultural products and social norms; second, exalting a utopia in which government control barely exists and people live together with their inborn *xing* intact.”<sup>41</sup> In this latter element, the primitivist and Yangist arguments overlap. The

*Zhuangzi* explains that even if the whole world were to conform and reward the good people, it would truly never be sufficient to reward their goodness. Likewise, the morally unworthy could not be punished enough.<sup>42</sup> If these moral standards were truly successful at making people good, then following the footsteps of Yao would guarantee happiness, but so far following these guidelines have given rise to folks like Robber Zhi with an even greater frequency than people like Zeng and Shi. Systems of rewards and punishments based on sagely wisdom have caused people to cease to pay attention to their own sense of what is right and wrong, or what is best for their own natures.<sup>43</sup> The *Zhuangzi* argues that honoring standards such as these is nothing more than deception on a mass scale. Not only are people encouraged to corrupt their *xing*, but they are also directed to celebrate their subordination to things extraneous to their *xing*.

This section has noted that enacting moral guidelines to make people good has instead given rise to folks like Jie and Robber Zhi. Zhi was used to demonstrate that the venerated systems of reward and punishment and corresponding dogma about moral and immoral behavior ultimately produce

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<sup>40</sup> Jie was the final ruler of the Xia. The *Huainanzi* explains that Jie built a lake of wine and was notorious for his misrule and wanton execution of loyal ministers, ultimately collapsing the dynasty.

<sup>41</sup> Chiu, “The Debate over *Xing*,” 556.

<sup>42</sup> This may also be a further reference to the late Qin dynasty’s apparent penchant for reward and punishment, but it is more likely that the author resists the notion of reward and punishment for the ways in which it alters one’s behavior and response; this artificial “second nature” is no longer a person’s original *xing*, if it is still *xing* at all.

<sup>43</sup> If people were to instead rest upon the instincts of their nature, the *Zhuangzi* says they would be indifferent to these sorts of things.

the very “ne’er-do-wells” that such a system should allegedly prevent. The Zhuangzian perspective insists on abandoning systems which encourage people to abandon their *xing* in pursuit of honors and acclaim or avoid punishments. The next section explicitly makes clear how this moralist hypocrisy found in Confucian teaching can even turn people who try to do good and encourage others to behave morally into unwitting bandits of a surprisingly diabolical sort, and Zhi will put forward an alternative social order which leaves *xing* unperturbed.

### Robber Zhi or Robber Confucius?

This section addresses Chapter 29 of the *Zhuangzi*, which details a humorous albeit fictitious confrontation between the Robber Zhi and Confucius (c. 551–c. 479 BCE). Zhi is deployed as the mouthpiece for the author of the chapter, who makes the ironic point that the exhortations of Confucius do not produce moral order but enable Confucius to live as a robber. The hypocrisy of the Confucian position makes Zhi by comparison appear much more honest and sensible. While identifying Confucian ideas as violently hostile to life and noxious to human *xing*, the chapter also uses Zhi to outline a moral and political alternative in the Shen-Nong paradigm prior to Yao and Shun.

While Zhi bears the name robber, this chapter insists that Confucius is also a kind of thief. Zhi accuses Confucius of

arbitrarily spouting your own rights and wrongs in order to confuse rulers all over the world and prevent its learned men from recovering their original natures. You absurdly fabricate notions of filial obedience and fraternal duty in the hope that you will gain the patronage of some enfeoffed (*sic*) lord or some wealthy and eminent personage. Your crime is so great it should be punished by death.<sup>44</sup>

Speaking of Confucius’s treatment elsewhere in the *Zhuangzi*, Saunders notes: “The idea seems to be that Kongzi’s own aggressive campaign to encourage people to meet his standard of benevolence will inevitably harm people by disrupting or even destroying their *xing*, when instead the regularities they are born with, just like those in nature, are

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<sup>44</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 509.

perfectly sufficient to guide us to flourishing."<sup>45</sup> Zhi here condemns Confucius's actions for much the same reasons:

Now here you go cultivating the Dao of King Wen (Civilization) and King Wu (Warfare), manipulating opinion all over the world, so you can become teacher to all generations to come; using your fine-stitched robe and broad-waist sash, deceitful words and hypocritical behavior, to confuse and mislead rulers all over the world, so you can get wealth and honor from them. Since no robber is worse than you, why does the whole world not call you Robber Qiu instead of calling me Robber Zhi?<sup>46</sup>

Confucius convinced people that he is an arbitrator of upright moral conduct, yet Zhi catches him in the process of employing deceit and flattery to rehabilitate a bandit's character in order to present him as a paragon of virtue and install him in office.

This duplicity makes Zhi livid, and he recounts many of the other men who bought into Confucian virtues but met terrible ends. These men were what the world considered, according to sagely wisdom, men of excellent character and virtue. Rather than preoccupying oneself with things like the five sounds and flavors and sights,<sup>47</sup> Zhi explains the importance of following one's *xing*, saying, "anyone who fails to gratify the aspirations of his will or neglects to nourish his longevity can't possibly be in step with the Dao."<sup>48</sup> This conforms completely with the primitivist viewpoint on *xing*, explained by Saunders:

The primitivists worry that culturally determined ways of organizing sensory phenomena and the culturally determined exemplars, goals, stimulus responses, and attitudes that grow out of them cause widespread anxiety throughout society, eventually leading to chaos, while a better course of action is to let people be and leave them alone (*zai you* 在宥).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Saunders, "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*," 5.

<sup>46</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 511.

<sup>47</sup> Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters*, 199, 222. Graham explains that these patterns of concepts arranged in groups of five would have been the acme of Han dynasty thought and disputation, and Zhi may be shown to employ them to demonstrate his familiarity with the methods of argumentation of that era.

<sup>48</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 511.

<sup>49</sup> Saunders, "Primitivism in the *Zhuangzi*," 4–5.

The author or authors of Chapter 29, through Zhi, argue that attuning oneself to goals and standards exterior to oneself, or sacrificing one's own health and wellbeing for any reason, are clearly not in-line with the *dao*. This points to a congruency between primitivist and Yangist doctrines regarding *xing*.

Compared to the *dao* that Zhi values, which preserves *xing*, Confucius's *dao* is called "muddled and frenetic, a cunningly deceitful, hypocritical affair, and not at all useful for perfecting one's authenticity, so what good is there in saying any more about it!"<sup>50</sup> This Confucian *dao* does not affirm life and one's inborn nature or *xing*, so as Guo Xiang writes in his commentary, there is little reason to waste one's breath discussing it.<sup>51</sup>

Zhi next presents an alternative to the Confucian moral order: the Shen-Nong paradigm. In the time before the sages, the era of perfect virtue, people had simple things and simple desires and lived in harmony.<sup>52</sup> Rather than compete for moral accolades or seizing states and wealth, the people did not have an inkling of harming or stealing from each other. This era of perfect virtue subsided into an era of warfare and domination in the reign of the Yellow Emperor, and the resulting violence of the system he established—the system of sagely wisdom—is what Zhi condemns and Confucius exhorts.

Zhi proceeds to criticize Yao and Shun. These two sage-kings are by commonsensical Confucian consideration the epitome of sagely governance, but their behavior was awful: "Yao killed his oldest son and Shun exiled his mother's youngest brother—are there any normal relations between close and distant kin here?"<sup>53</sup> By Confucian standards, even these two are hardly as filial as their reputations suggest. As far as the *Zhuangzi* is concerned, whoever followed the way of the sages has either conducted violence, engendered it in the world, or died an awful death.

The relatively bombastic debate between Confucius and Zhi is certainly a fabricated exchange, but this section has pointed to an underexplored degree of duplicity in Confucian moral dogma. Confucius's remarks, if rendered realistically as Zhi outlines, use moralism as a guise to manipulate and rob people. Before the moral regime that enabled that behavior, in the Shen-Nong era, people lived in harmony. Since the

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<sup>50</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 512.

<sup>51</sup> Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 58–59. Graham explains that this idea that one should never sacrifice one's life or body for any external reason likely originates from the Yangist school attributed to Yang Zhu, or Yangzi, whose principle was mentioned by Mengzi. This conforms with the understanding of the value of one's life over that of material things outlined here, although there is humor in the fact that Zhi is presumably materialistic because he is a bandit.

<sup>52</sup> Under these conditions, *xing* and potency (*de*) were undisturbed, and the people did not even engage in ancestor worship.

<sup>53</sup> Lynn, *Zhuangzi: A New Translation*, 514.

introduction of Confucian teachings, a hypocritical moral veneer has obscured the violence inherent in exerting moral discipline. Though the moralists presume to know what is best for *xing* and claim to bring order to society, from the Zhuangzian perspective, there could not be a moral system more hazardous to *xing*, and the even sage-kings who engineered it cannot themselves satisfy their own standards.

## Conclusion

This article concludes by suggesting that a normative position might be derived (somewhat ironically) from the preceding reading of a Zhuangzian account of *xing* and repudiation of normative moralizing in the *Zhuangzi*. The Yangist notion of valuing *xing* and allowing one to live out the full term of one's allotted life over all else must be considered in tandem with the primitivist utopian Shen-Nong paradigm. The congruence between the different references to Zhi across Chapters 8, 10, 11, and 29 of the *Zhuangzi* presents a synthesis of primitivist and Yangist claims which produce a cohesive Zhuangzian account of *xing*. Consistently, Zhi is used to demonstrate the danger to *xing* posed by moralist exemplars and the hypocrisy of conventions established by sagely wisdom. Pursuant to the Yangist argument, the material rewards or moral recognition one may glean from conformity with such cultural artifice are worthless compared to the cost to one's life of corrupting one's *xing*. The *Zhuangzi* repeatedly exhorts the reader across these chapters to recognize that what society holds to be good and bad, and especially the sagely wisdom it venerates, are both noxious to *xing* and empowering to unscrupulous thieves. Not only do such conventions and systems of reward and punishment fail to protect people who conform, but they form a hypocritical moral veneer that has obscured the violence inherent in enforcing that system in the first place.

At the heart of this Zhuangzian criticism is resistance to the moral discipline associated with the wisdom of the sages and the moralist regime which perpetuates its cultural hegemony. The moralists are so derided by the authors of these chapters because they assumed that they knew what was best for *xing*; they thought that there were objective standards for right and wrong which *xing* could conform to. From the Zhuangzian perspective, this demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of what *xing* is. The above focus on Robber Zhi has demonstrated that a philosophy of non-intervention and preservation of *xing* in the *Zhuangzi* is motivated by a sincere aversion to the very notion of robust ethical and political philosophy. What is best for human *xing* is for it to be left alone to develop spontaneously without interference, which it will do naturally as a matter of course if a person's basic needs are met, such as the Shen-Nong paradigm. A return to a state of society even

more primordial than that of the prehistoric sage kings would have been as politically unfeasible for the authors in 205 BCE as it is today, but the anxiety with which they lament the rise of moralists vying for political office may resonate even now. From the Zhuangzian perspective, such moralizers look much more like thieves than sages.

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Article

## Levinas's Ethics in the Age of Social Media: Faces on Facebook and the Face of the Other

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*Anders Kølle*

**Abstract:** Levinas's ethics is based on the direct and unmediated encounter with the Other. It is in the immediate presence of the Other, being face-to-face with the Other, that relationality and responsibility are born. Our ethical obligations, however immeasurable they may be in Levinas's ethics, always originate in this shared here-and-now. In today's digital and social media age where interpersonal encounters and social relationships have found many new forms and expressions, Levinas's direct and unmediated encounter is, however, increasingly replaced by digital profiles and digital representations, rendering the Other now addressable at any time and from anywhere. In this paper, I discuss what implications these technological developments have on Levinas's "concept" of the face of the Other. Drawing not only on Levinas's ethics but including Benjamin and his concept of the aura in the discussion as well, I argue that the unlimited representability characterizing today's social media platforms threatens the very possibility of otherness that Levinas sought to protect by translating the encounter with the Other into reproducible and computable data, thereby placing the encounter itself within a frame that privileges correspondence and likeness over otherness.

**Keywords:** Levinas, Zuckerberg, social media, the Other

Levinas' ethics begins with the encounter with the Other. It is in front of the Other, when facing the Other that a sense of responsibility is born and the infinite value of human life is first asserted. For good reasons, Levinas always envisioned this encounter as a direct, unmediated face-to-face meeting. Writing most of his work well before the advent of the internet, at a time when presence and being, immediacy and relationality were still closely tied and physical encounters still the norm, Levinas always thought of the Other as someone physically present: they could be someone one runs into in

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the street, a stranger suddenly addressing one in the subway, or a foreigner unexpectedly knocking on one's door. It would be in the here-and-now of a shared time and space that the unpredictable and unfathomable alterity of the Other would be met. If Levinas's encounter with the Other is always steeped in uncertainty and unknowability, at least the here-and-now of the encounter—the presence of the Other facing me—is never put into question.

In today's digital world, our interpersonal relations have found many new forms and expressions not anticipated by Levinas. An increasing number of encounters are with people we shall never physically meet or know outside the digital platforms. Social media gives us access to billions of people from all over the world, and TikTok and YouTube facilitate encounters of a completely virtual nature. The Other is no longer necessarily standing before me, confronting me, addressing me, but is physically distant and possibly addressing no one in particular. Levinas's unity of time and space, the here-and-now of the encounter, has in our digital world been broken down into multiple temporal and spatial pieces, and the immediate presence of the Other is replaced by digital representations. We have moved from a world of presence to one of *tele-presence*<sup>1</sup>—presence at a distance—and the Other has consequently become a *tele-Other*: someone whose face and features we know only from our screens—someone whose here-and-now is always elsewhere and displaced. But if these technological developments have undoubtedly changed and multiplied the types of encounters we may engage in, it is far less obvious what, if any, consequences these developments have on Levinas's ethics. Do our responsibilities for the tele-Other remain the same as to the Other? Are our ethical obligations unaltered by technological advancements and means of presentation? Are they identical across sites and platforms and regardless of the sort of encounters we are seeking? How far into data sets, data streams, and dating sites does the Levinasian ethics reach? Or, to put it slightly differently: What specific challenges do we confront when trying to translate and transplant the face of the Other from a stage of physical encounters to one of virtual encounters, from here-and-now to anywhere and anytime, from being present together to being tele-presented for one another? As the face of the Other is freed from previous spatial and temporal limitations, the question is how this freedom either distances us or ties and obligates us even further to Levinas's ethical teachings.

### Shapeless Faces

It is impossible to define precisely what Levinas means by the face. No clear description or final analysis is ever offered despite this concept's

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (London: Verso Books, 2008).

pivotal role in Levinas's authorship. Levinas's face is a forever elusive face—a face we can never be certain how to face. This indefiniteness and elusiveness, this strange and ghostly quality, is by no means accidental or unintended—Levinas's ethics may even be said to depend on it: only to the extent that the face remains beyond description, beyond our grasp is the alterity of the Other respected in its true and complete otherness. The face is therefore what cannot be circumscribed by any words or reduced to any finite idea. The face overflows any concept we may have and transgresses any plastic image we may form.<sup>2</sup> For the same reason Levinas rejects any purely phenomenological approach to the face since phenomenology would lead us in the wrong direction and towards a finite object, a circumscribable thing, instead of the unlimited presence that Levinas seeks. In Levinas's own words:

I do not know if one can speak of a “phenomenology” of the face, since phenomenology describes what appears. So, too, I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond perception, beyond knowledge, the face is at once near and infinitely far away. It is near by being straightaway ethical—ethical without detours, without deferrals and delays—and it is distant by being irreducible to anything that appears before us and hence can be looked at and described: the color of the eyes, the shape of the nose, etc. What is specifically the face is therefore paradoxically what escapes any specification. The social relationship with the Other begins where perceptions and observations end. One must therefore relate to the face in a relationship without stable qualities and objects, one must encounter the Other without countering a single, identifiable thing. If this sounds ethereal, even ghostly, it is because Levinas seeks by all means to protect the face—protect the face from falling into the

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Livonia: XanEdu Publishing, 1969), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 86.

trap of a form and thus protect the Other from the closure of the identifiable and the same:

*The absolute experience is not disclosure but revelation: a coinciding of the expressed with him who expresses, which is the privileged manifestation of the Other, the manifestation of a face over and beyond form. Form—incessantly betraying its own manifestation, congealing into a plastic form, for it is adequate to the same—alienates the exteriority of the other.<sup>4</sup>*

A face regarded as a form is also a face that can be described—and a face that can be described is a face that can be specified, identified, and governed: governed through representations, governed through reductions to the same. The passport photo, the identity papers, the ethnic or racial profile are the constant threats that press on alterity and ethics from all sides. Humanity is easily undressed and cut down to a single form and a few simple characteristics. Dehumanization commonly begins with a demystification that robs the Other of his ungraspable otherness to produce a single image: the Jew, the Arab, the Slav. It is against types and caricatures, against reductions and violent appropriations, that Levinas protects and preserves the face—and it is against a history of genocide and ethnic cleansing that Levinas's Other must remain fundamentally unknowable, always beyond any grasp. There is, in other words, both a sense of great urgency and great necessity behind Levinas's ethereal and transgressive Other. One must recognize very recent terrors and cruelties in the face that is not looked at, in the eyes without shape and color. And one must hear the sound of screams and wars and people hopelessly pleading for their lives in the very first word that the face according to Levinas speaks: "Thou shalt not kill."<sup>5</sup> This order, this command places me before an infinite responsibility for the Other—a responsibility that is infinite because the alterity of the Other is itself limitless and infinite transgression.

## Presence and Temporality

As previously mentioned, for Levinas, the encounter with the face always takes place in a direct face-to-face encounter. In *Totality and Infinity*, the face is described as a "living presence"<sup>6</sup> and all his examples are founded on shared moments, shared presence in a shared space:

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<sup>4</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 65–66.

<sup>5</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 66.

Meaning is not produced as an ideal essence: it is said and taught by presence, and teaching is not reducible to sensible or intellectual intuition, which is the thought of the same. To give meaning to one's presence is an event irreducible to evidence. It does not enter into an intuition; it is a presence more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence—that of the other.<sup>7</sup>

But why, we may ask, is this this presence so crucial to Levinas? Can the Other not address us from a different space and at a different time? Can meaning not be produced and can we not feel responsible for those who are not presently here or not addressing us directly? And given that the face in its specificity is precisely not to be looked at, not to be dominated by perception, why must it then face us at all? One might very well get the feeling that someone not mentioned in these encounters, someone that Levinas seeks to distance himself from (namely, Heidegger), is in fact very much present at these face-to-face meetings—facing Levinas as he deliberately looks away and towards the Other. This suspicion is based not only on the easy parallel one might draw between Levinas's "living presence" and Heidegger's *Dasein*—being-there, being present in the world that we know from *Being and Time*<sup>8</sup> and which precisely seeks to challenge conventional subject-object positions and dichotomies—but also, and more importantly, because of Heidegger's much later analysis and critique of representations and objectifications that we find in the essays "The Question Concerning Technology"<sup>9</sup> and "The Age of the World Picture."<sup>10</sup> If Levinas is determined to keep the Other in the "living presence" and to protect the face from perception and knowledge, it is possibly Heidegger who best explains why. As we read in "The Age of the World Picture":

Knowing, as research, calls whatever is to account with regard to the way in which and the extent to which it lets itself be put at the disposal of representation. Research has disposal over anything that is when it can either calculate it in its future course in advance or verify a

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

calculation about it as past. Nature, in being calculated in advance, and history, in being historiographically verified as past, become, as it were “set in place”. Nature and history become the objects of a representing that explains. Such representing counts on nature and takes account of history. Only that which becomes object in this way is—is considered to be in being. We first arrive at science as research when the Being of whatever is, is sought in such objectiveness.<sup>11</sup>

A frightful constellation is here described in which whatever only counts as being when forced into representation and objectification. It is through representation that being is placed before us, in front of us, as something calculable and explainable and hence knowable and governable. One might easily see from this passage why Levinas must insist that the face is irreducible to any plastic image and the Other must remain beyond any finite idea. The domestication and domination of all alterity that the modern sciences achieve through pictures and representations is the very opposite of the ethical and responsible stance Levinas is looking for. The disposal over anything in research, the “setting in place” of everything that is must be confronted and countered by an ethics that insists on the Other’s unrepresentable, unsettled, and unsettling alterity. The “living presence” of the face is thus in direct opposition to the deadly grip of modern sciences. And the here-and-now of the encounter as well as the straightaway ethical obligation opposes the always mediated, always pictured and represented scientific approach to the world. If the sciences need a certain distance in both time and space to create its maps, illustrations, diagrams, and measures, then the ethical relationship to the Other must be immediate, direct, without deferrals and delays. That is why the face is always near—so near, in fact, that its presence cannot be represented. But that is also why the face is at the same time distant—too distant to be fully unveiled and grasped. One might, with good reason, feel confused about these distances that appear contradictory and that seem primarily motivated and set in “place” to keep the face itself from being ever finally placed. Levinas puts his face either too close or too far from us to be able to ever fully see it. This is not only the case in *Totality and Infinity* but remains the case throughout his authorship. Levinas thus appears to involve us in a Freudian sort of “*fort/da*”-game<sup>12</sup> in which the “*da*,” the “here,” always motivates another “*fort*,” “gone”—and the “gone” is only reached so another return to “here” can be made. But this game is not played

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 126–127.

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990).

for the sake of amusement or to tease the reader but to prevent calculable distances to turn into calculable faces and calculable Others. And the presence of the Other is indispensable for the very same reason since the present moment is precisely what is always too near, too immediate to be mediated and become the object of a distancing and stabilizing reflection – which also means that the present moment is what is always beyond theorization, always “*fort*” and ungraspable for a purely scientific regard. If Jacques Derrida, with good reason, has questioned and criticized the Western tradition of privileging presence over absence, sameness over difference, unity over plurality in what he has famously called “the Western metaphysics of presence,”<sup>13</sup> then this grand critique can, however, only reach and include Levinas in an ambiguous and anything but straightforward way. While Levinas does indeed appear to “fit” the general description and undoubtedly privileges presence in his ethics, this siding with the present is not motivated by a search for neither unity or origin but, on the contrary, to safeguard the possibility of plurality and difference. The presence of the Other and our immediate responsibility for the Other – without deferrals, without delays – is precisely unmediated and undeferred in the very names of alterity and difference. Only by being always close, perhaps too close for our comfort, does the Other retain his immeasurable distance. Only by directly confronting us are we unsure precisely who and what we are facing. Differences are not stifled or eliminated but rather vitalized and multiplied in the living presence of the Other. If the modern sciences seek to encompass everything and include everyone in its calculations and representations then Levinas’s Other is the one, the many, the innumerable that get away. And if the modern sciences protect themselves against alterity through pictures and diagrams then Levinas’s encounters mean unimaginable and immediate risk and incalculable exposure. Because the Other is present, right here, in front of me, I can neither hide myself nor escape my responsibility. And because the Other is always different from me, he inevitably exposes me to this very difference. Difference is, in other words, the risk I take and must keep taking in my encounter with the Other.

### Facing Aura

In addition to Heidegger’s unannounced visit at Levinas’s rendezvous with the Other, there seems to be yet another thinker who turns up unexpectedly. We are thinking here of Walter Benjamin whose concept of the aura and whose analysis of art in the essay “The Work of Art in the Age

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016).

of Its Technological Reproducibility” envisages, in important ways, many of the questions Levinas will be dealing with and to some extent repeat in his much later contemplations on the face.

What characterizes the work of art, writes Benjamin, is its here-and-now—its unique existence in a particular place: “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>14</sup> The experience of art—prior to its technological reproducibility—is invariably tied to presence, to the work of art being present before us. Our experience of art thus comes in the form of an encounter with the work in its absolute and irreducible uniqueness—being only here, being unquestionably singular. But however straightforward and univocal these initial remarks may seem, Benjamin soon complicates this encounter significantly. This happens when the idea of the aura enters the encounter. For although the aura is intimately linked and to some extent already described by the uniqueness and the here-and-now of the artwork, the aura is also, at the same time, what defies such a quick and facile identification. In one of the few passages where Benjamin faces the aura directly we get the following description:

What, then, is the aura? A strange tissue of time and space: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. To follow with the eye—while resting on a summer afternoon—a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch.<sup>15</sup>

The moment we as readers might think we have understood and grasped the aura is also the moment Benjamin takes any such assurance away. The aura is in the here-and-now, in the singular presence of things but it is also, we now learn, the apparition of a distance, however near it may be. What, in Benjamin’s example, begins as a very simple and straightforward image—the eye following a mountain range on the horizon and the shadow of a branch—is complicated and distanced in the same breath. For Benjamin might very well see the mountain and observe the branch but the aura is not what he *sees* or *observes* but what he *breathes*. The mountains and the shadow thus move at once closer and further away—melts into air—and the previously simple here-and-now of the experience, the here-and-now that founded and secured the encounter, is now, very suddenly, called a “strange

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in *The Work of Art in Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

tissue of time and space." Any attempt of picturing the aura is hence made complex, if not obsolete. Benjamin's illustration shows emphatically just how difficult any illustration is. Or to put it in a slightly more Levinasian fashion: the aura overflows any plastic image and transgresses any solid idea. Being both breathable and present and yet the apparition of a distance, it is at once too close and too far away. And thus we return, now in the company of Benjamin, to a familiar—always unfamiliar—*fort/da*-game: the aura is right now, right here, but this here-and-now is the apparition of a distance, however near it may be. If Levinas's face should not be dominated by perception—although this always remains a possibility—Benjamin's aura *cannot* be dominated by perception for the very simple reason that we never know precisely where to look. Nothing is pointed out, nothing is settled and given but the distance itself. And what is this distance? Between who or what? From where to where? Benjamin doesn't tell us. A distance is presented, given to us readers that dissolves before we get a chance to truly receive it: a distance at a distance—a distance of a distance. No gift could possibly be lighter and further away. Something is measured beyond measure, something is given that cannot be received. From the very presence of the mountains and of the branch and its shadow, from an entirely familiar and unspectacular situation, a specter emerges and unfamiliarity begins to haunt the scene. Sameness is forcefully ruled out by this alterity—can nowhere be found or established—and together with the possibility of sameness disappears also the entire dreadful and deadening constellation that Heidegger described in "The Age of the World Picture," leading from images, graphs, and diagrams to the modern sciences' absolute domination. The aura's distance cannot be brought any closer. It is, in a strange sense, always already too close and distances itself incessantly. And we are, as readers, thus facing something Benjamin is facing—already so many distances!—as it moves across both vistas and words, landing nowhere and everywhere, at home and homeless in everything—moving like Kafka's Odradek through the house of language, pictures, and representations. If this imageless presence nevertheless does make enough of an impression to serve as an inspiration—or an exhalation—we suggest that the aura will also, decades after Benjamin, glide as a phantom through Levinas's ethical writings and make its strange apparition in his (non)description of the face. We call Levinas's face auratic because it, as Benjamin's aura, is the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be—a presence that presents itself beyond any possible representation. And we call the face auratic because it is irreducible to any form, incomparable with any solid figure, ungrounded in any discernible shape. And, finally, we call Levinas's face auratic to bring it closer to the infinite depths of mysticism, spirituality, and religion that still resounds in the word "aura"—which is a spirituality and a

mysticism that we know played an important part in both Levinas's and Benjamin's thinking and writing in a continuously both settling and unsettling relation.<sup>16</sup> For would Levinas's Other still be Other if we did not allow for any spiritual dimension in this otherness? Would the face still be a face if unadorned by the possibility of being also always more than a face, beyond and above anything that truly could be faced? The distances and differences are unending but they nevertheless seem engaged in an ethereal and spectral encounter where something is shared between the aura, the face, and the Other—something which stays in front of us, addressing us, by being beyond any fixed address and immeasurably far away.

### Withering Faces

Among all these breaths and airy constellations we should not forget what Benjamin's text is more concretely and manifestly about what it is trying to bring to our attention—namely, that the aura and all of the abovementioned distances are disappearing: "One might focus these aspects of the artwork in the concept of the aura, and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura."<sup>17</sup> The aura withers, and it withers at the dawn of a new era in which novel technological developments make images infinitely repeatable, infinitely reproducible, thus destroying the very uniqueness and singularity that used to characterize the work of art. It is in the shape of photography and especially film that the work's uniqueness is being erased and now replaced by completely identical images—one reproduction of a photograph or a film being identical to all other reproductions. Where there used to be difference there is now identity, and where the experience of art was once inseparable from the here-and-now of the encounter with the work, the new, reproduced image may be consumed anytime and anywhere. In Benjamin's own words:

Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image, or, better, in a facsimile, a reproduction. And the reproduction, as offered by illustrated magazines and newsreels, differs unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former. The stripping of the veil of the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose "sense for all

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<sup>16</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932–1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin, "Work of Art," 22.

that is the same in the world" has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique.<sup>18</sup>

If the aura signifies the forever distant and ungraspable—the apparition of a distance, however near it may be—then the new era of mechanical reproducibility expresses a desire for the exact opposite: it wants clear and well-defined objects—and it wants them at close range: objects to be grasped, objects to be seized, objects to be consumed. There is no longer any interest in what makes an escape—only in what can be brought inescapably near. This firm grasp requires sameness guaranteed across time and space and not difference turning up at every moment, in every place. It has no interest in uninvited and unexpected alterity. And it requires that the presence of the object is therefore given in a form and at a time that is brought fully under control, fully exhausted, by a representation. Presence in both the Benjaminian and Levinasian sense—the presence of the aura, the presence of the face—is in the age of reproducibility therefore no longer a deep and incalculable presence, no longer a living or breathing presence, but a circumscribed and calculable presence rendered as flat as an image in an illustrated magazine. If Levinas explicitly warns us against dominating the face by perception and if Benjamin's aura is always too ethereal and distant to be ever fully perceived then the new reality Benjamin is describing places perception and the joys of perception above all other questions and concerns. With the technologically reproducible work, we have moved, in Benjamin's terminology, from cult value to exhibition value. This does not mean, of course, that all distances and all differences have suddenly been eliminated or have at once, magically disappeared, but it does mean that they are now playing a very different role: distances are no longer what enable and protect alterity but what establish the conditions for sameness to be produced. The face that is to be turned into an image must be drawn, photographed, or filmed from a certain distance—a distance that the final image will necessarily keep. But this distance remains an always calculable and governable distance, always the "right" and ideal distance, to make perception as easy and complete as desired. Stripped of the aura, stripped of living presence, the one facing the camera must surrender to this "right" distance by which all other distances and escape routes are closed. And what is "right" from the perspective of the apparatus, the film camera, the recording device, is therefore easily experienced as problematic and false from the perspective of the one portrayed. To quote the Italian playwright and actor Luigi Pirandello:

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

The film actor ... feels as if exiled. Exiled not only from the stage but from his own person. With a vague unease, he senses an inexplicable void, stemming from the fact that his body has lost its substance, that he has been volatilized, stripped of his reality, his life, his voice, the noises he makes when moving about, and has been turned into a mute image that flickers for a moment on the screen, then vanishes into silence ... The little apparatus will play with his shadow before the audience, and he himself must be content to play before the apparatus.<sup>19</sup>

And as Benjamin continues:

The situation can also be characterized as follows: for the first time—and this is the effect of film—the human being is placed in a situation where he must operate with his whole living person, while forgoing its aura. For the aura is bound to his presence in the here and now. There is no facsimile of the aura.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, estrangement and self-alienation appear to be the actor Pirandello's experience—a feeling of otherness stepping unto the film set, taking his place. Yet this otherness is hardly the sort neither Benjamin nor Levinas can endorse or seek to protect since it is an otherness experienced purely as a loss, appearing only as a void, as nothingness, as annihilation. It is an otherness that is, in other words, the very end of the possibility of otherness, Pirandello having now been reduced to a flickering image, a moving shadow to be played with and infinitely reproduced and re-projected in movie theatres. Pirandello can no longer be Other to this image that from now on describes and defines him. And what would be of special significance and especially troubling for Levinas, would be the fact that Pirandello's sense of otherness is one with which he is left utterly alone. Performing before an apparatus instead of an audience, surrendering his image to be played with by others—in other spaces, at other times, in other situations and circumstances—Pirandello is not only exiled from his sense of self but also from his social bonds and connections. His image has taken his place in the encounter with others. Others will see his face, they will look at his features but this will no longer be a face that presents or encourages social

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted by Benjamin in *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

responsibilities and commitments. His face will, as Pirandello states, flicker for a moment on the screen, then vanish into silence. And in this brief "encounter," before the movie is over, before the next movie begins, this image, this face, will be completely dominated by perception. If, as Levinas states, "the best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes,"<sup>21</sup> one can be certain that the color of an actor's eyes, the shape of his nose, his chin, his forehead, etc., will be precisely what a movie audience will focus its attention on. If pure looking, pure perception is the very opposite of an ethical relationship, the very opposite of what Levinas means by the face, by an ethical subject, then the actor Pirandello, the man posing and acting in front of the camera, is without both a face and a place in Levinas's ethics. And how then should this flickering image, this ghostly appearance be able to utter the words that according to Levinas are the very first words the face of the Other speaks: Thou shall not kill?

### The Face in Facebook and Social Media

According to Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook was built to accomplish a social mission, namely, to make the world more open and connected.<sup>22</sup> This openness and connectedness is, for Facebook as well as for other social platforms, based on a basic idea of sharing—Facebook's users posting their thoughts and ideas, their joys and sorrows, pictures and videos of their dates and dinners with other users who are thus constantly and immediately informed about the doings and whereabouts of their friends and relatives. As Zuckerberg explains:

We built Facebook around a few simple ideas. People want to share and stay connected with their friends and the people around them. If we give people control over what they share, they will want to share more. If people share more, the world will become more open and connected. And a world that is more open and connected is a better world.<sup>23</sup>

As stated here, Mark Zuckerberg is, in fact, not only on a social mission, but also on an ethical one: the very aim of Facebook being ultimately to improve the world and our human conditions. The logic is straightforward and unidirectional: sharing leads to openness and connectedness, and

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<sup>21</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> George Beahm, *The Boy Billionaire: Mark Zuckerberg in His Own Words* (Evanston: Agate Publishing, 2012), 55.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

openness and connectedness leads to a better world. There is, in other words, a direct and, for Zuckerberg, unquestionable relation between the quantity of posts and the quality of the world: pictures and posts of all sorts are all equally contributing to making our world better.

But it should also already be clear from Zuckerberg's statement that what he means by sharing and by connection, what he aims at with his social, if not ethical, mission is substantially different from what Levinas intends and hopes to achieve using quite similar terms. Between, on the one hand, Zuckerberg's social mission and his "sharing" and "staying connected" and, on the other hand, Levinas's idea of a social relationship an abyss opens that cannot be traversed by the similarity of terms alone. If staying connected inevitably implies a distance that is overcome, a connection that is kept despite distances in time and space, then Levinas does not so much seek to overcome any distances as to acknowledge the distances as well as differences that the presence of the Other always presents. I do not "stay connected" with the Other since the alterity of the Other will always be beyond me, however near they may be. And my responsibilities do not end but rather begin from this insight—the Other's alterity being what both calls and obligates me.<sup>24</sup> If my connection to the Other is, in this sense, always a "bad" or "scratchy" connection, it is because I can never be quite certain precisely what I share with the Other nor how any sharing indeed may be possible. The otherness of the Other precludes any facile answers to this question. There is no sharing that can be secured or enhanced by the simple exchange of words, posts, and messages—no connections that are guaranteed by prolific communication alone. Ethical obligations can for Levinas therefore not depend on or wait for a shared and connected world to emerge but must be prior to and more fundamental than any sought after or found connections. As he explains in *Totality and Infinity*—here with Heidegger's philosophy in mind—ethics, i.e., the relation of the I to the Other, comes before ontology and Being<sup>25</sup>—which is also to say: I am always already obligated to the Other. What the Other thinks, means, or expresses brings me neither closer to nor further away from my ethical obligations. I am not waiting for any access, any opening, any shared or shareable perspective, any knowledge or information in order to measure or establish the extent of my responsibility. My responsibility is, in Levinas's ethics, always immediate, unmediated, unlimited—too close to me, too intimately related to me, to ever be the object of knowledge, perception and information.

Zuckerberg states he wants an open world, and he does not hesitate to equate this open world with a world that is also better. It appears to be

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<sup>24</sup> Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 67.

almost a truism to Zuckerberg that openness and improvement of our world go together. One might, nevertheless, wish to ask precisely what he means by this openness: openness to whom? Openness for what? What closure is Zuckerberg's grand clearing opposing? What border is it crossing or demolishing? What is it making room for?

If we return to Benjamin's analysis of art and images in the age of their technological reproducibility, we are reminded that the unique presence of any individual and of anything is what the infinite possibility of reproduction destroys. Instead of uniqueness we get sameness and a sense and desire for all that is the same in the world.<sup>26</sup> This desire is expressed in the appetite for objects, the urge to get hold of objects at close range in the form of images and their reproductions. Everywhere sameness is thus extracted to present us with perfectly graspable and consumable objects, stripped of the aura, the veil, the differences and distances that previously hindered such swift and easy consumption. And it was for Benjamin the actor Pirandello who best expressed the experience of this deprivation—who gave the loss of aura and of uniqueness a (in)human face: surrendering himself to the apparatus, surrendering to the production of images, to the production of duplicates and likenesses, Pirandello himself was exiled from his sense of self, estranged from his own individual and singular being. Such were in Benjamin's words and analysis the consequences and human costs of infinitely reproducible images. If the invention of photography and film constituted in one sense therefore an important technological breakthrough—indeed an “opening” to a new world of both information and entertainment—then this very same development appeared in another and strictly untechnical, unscientific, and uniquely individual sense as an abrupt closure: turned into an image, turned into an object, Pirandello was estranged from his own here-and-now, deprived access to his own living presence. Exhibition value came at a personal price. The grand clearing that photography and film made and meant in the domains of transmissions and communication left something behind and outside the equation—something too ethereal and immeasurable to ever be shot and captured on film.

But the question that must concern us here, however, is no longer about the openings and closures produced by film but about Zuckerberg's vision of an increasingly open world. How much—or perhaps how little—of Benjamin's analysis remains true in our digital world and is still relevant to an analysis of today's digital platforms? And of even greater importance to us: How does this either include or exclude Levinas's conception of the face, the ethical subject, and the presence of the Other from these same platforms? What openings or closures are we facing?

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 23–24.

From a purely quantitative perspective there is no doubt that today's social media have only increased—even exponentially—the production and reproduction of images. It is precisely this immediate access to a baffling number of images and videos of all types—available at any moment from anywhere—that is one of the great achievements of the digital revolution. Another important breakthrough, more specifically relating to social media, is the possibility for users to produce and share their own content, to create their own pictures and videos and make them instantly available to others. If Pirandello was forced to play a game determined by others—the filmmaker, the producer, the cameraman, etc.—then many of today's Instagrammers and prosumers are simultaneously actors and filmmakers and producers of their own work. This is undoubtedly at least part of the empowerment of social media users that Zuckerberg refers to in the previously quoted remark: “If we give people control over what they share, they will want to share more.”<sup>27</sup> But behind this apparent mastery now given to the users lies an unspoken condition and constraint—possibly too obvious to Zuckerberg to even deserve mentioning: control over one's own images and posts is granted only on the condition that Facebook may harvest all the data.<sup>28</sup> Together, the vacation photos, the birthday videos, the party images, and their many likes and comments form an individual profile, drawing an image of the user which Facebook immediately profits from by selling data to advertisers, statisticians, political parties, or political interest groups.<sup>29</sup> This datafication carried out by algorithms provides Facebook with an incredibly precise picture of all its users, their likes and dislikes, their joys and sorrows, their political ideas or inclinations. The users of Facebook and other social media are thus “free” to express themselves and in complete control over the content as long as this freedom serves Facebook's commercial interest and can be used in a commercial game to which the users have no access, no knowledge, and absolutely no control. Is this the opening Zuckerberg is talking about? Is this the path he wants us to take towards a better and more connected, more transparent world? If Pirandello felt estranged in front of the film camera, felt he was being robbed of his very living presence, today's social media users have good reason to feel every bit as estranged—ostracized and exiled from their own algorithmically produced profiles, estranged in front of the digital apparatus. In this sense, social media has only tightened the grip of both things and people that Benjamin already described in regard to photography and film. And if this desire for graspable objects leaves no room for the aura

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<sup>27</sup> Beahm, *Boy Billionaire*, 67.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Carah, *Media and Society: Power, Platforms, and Participation* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2021), 190–191.

<sup>29</sup> David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Clayton Childress, *Media/Society: Technology, Industries, Content, and Users* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2022), 366–367.

and has no interest in what cannot be measured, calculated, and immediately turned into harvestable data, then not only the aura but also Levinas's Other (and hence Levinas's ethics) would be equally incompatible with today's social media and denied access to the platforms in advance. The very alterity that Levinas sought to safeguard, the irreducibility of the Other to knowledge and concepts, to perception and calculations, is an alterity that must be either forced into sameness or bypassed and completely ignored. The uncertainty that always accompanies Levinas's encounter with the Other and the risk we thereby must take with the Other, in front of the Other—the risk of incomprehension, the risk of immeasurable distances and incalculable differences—is a risk social media have no financial incentive, and therefore see no reason, to take.

Wherein lies then social media's social mission? What encounters are we left with? What faces? The openness Zuckerberg advertises is closing in on us from all sides and leaves us with no encounters and no social roles to play that are not already scripted and coded and thus predetermined and predestined by the social media themselves. Social platforms may very well free us to say what we want but the overall script remains written by others and hidden from view—guarded as a sacred text in impenetrable digital vaults. We thus find ourselves confronted with a new distance that has nothing in common with neither Benjamin's nor Levinas's distances—the distances of the aura, the distances to the Other, however near they may be—but is the distance in the form of a digital abyss that separates us from our own data, dissociates us from our own profiles and bars us from knowing how these data and profiles are used. And does this distance not also alter the conditions for relating to others that we meet on social media—disconnect us in our very search for connections, friendships, romance, exchanges on social media platforms? Can we completely disregard how these encounters are framed and how they are used? Can we be present to each other despite the secretive calculations and operations that underlie and undergird our online presence? If Levinas's encounter was always a direct, unmediated encounter, it was to protect this encounter from ever becoming an object, a thing among things, an image among images. It is where the object dissolves, where perception goes blind, where knowledge is powerless that Levinas's ethics begins.

## Conclusion

As we have argued in this paper, Levinas's emphasis on presence—the presence of the face, the presence of the Other—is intimately linked to the very possibility of otherness to emerge: the here-and-now of the encounter being the risk I take with the Other, in their nearness, exposing me

immediately and without delay or any possible retreat to their radical and immeasurable alterity. An ethical encounter with the Other must therefore be an unmediated encounter, always beyond representation, outside any stable or stabilizing images that would render the Other perceptible, knowable and thus reduce their otherness to sameness. If such reductionism is already visible in the media of photography and film, as analyzed by Benjamin, then today's social media has only driven this reductionism further, transforming our human interactions into digital data and digital profiles, translating our communication into calculable, harvestable, and salable information. The connectedness and openness that social media promises their users is thus a connectedness deeply embedded in commercial interests and an opening designed to generate profit. Placed on this stage, Levinas's Other is thus without any place, and the face of the Other must disappear among the billions of faces on Facebook.

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212 LEVINAS'S ETHICS

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## Kabataang Walang Muwang at ang Makatarungang Lipunan

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*Ian Anthony Davatos*

**Abstract:** This paper examines the place of innocent children within the multiverse of reason and the possibility of transforming society according to Agustin Martin Rodriguez in consideration of the welfare of children. The first part of the article examines what Rodriguez calls “laro ng sarili” (play of the self) and how such play reflects (or not) the play of childhood, particularly in the context of the multiverse of reason. The second part presents Rodriguez’s multiverse of reason in order to show how society becomes unjust and how to address the unjust state of society. By citing three examples it will also be shown why the solutions presented are not enough to address the plight of innocent children. The third part introduces the idea of the universe of needs that will create space for innocent children within the multiverse of reason. Such framework will provide direction to the discourse underlying the multiverse of reason.

**Keywords:** Rodriguez, Filipino philosophy, multiverse of reason, universe of needs

### Ang Laro ng Sarili

**K**ung ang isang makatarungang lipunan ay binubuo ng mga indibidwal na malayang naipapahayag ang sarili at malayang natatahak ang direksyon na nais nila sa buhay, lumilitaw na mahalagang maunawaan kung ano ba talaga ang ibig sabihin ng pagiging isang ako. Ito ay dahil ang ako ang magiging batayan kung talaga bang naipapahayag ko ang tunay na ako, o sadya lamang idinidikta sa akin ng sino-man na hindi ako ang mga bagay na dapat kong piliin o tahakin sa buhay.

Isa itong reyalidad na mariin nang napansin ni Agustin Martin Rodriguez. Meron siyang tinatawag na “mga batayang pananalig na

nagbibigay-depenisyon sa buhay-tao”<sup>1</sup> na malaki ang gampanin upang bigyang direksyon ang buhay ng isang indibidwal. Binigay niyang halimbawa ang pananalig “na dapat laging may pag-unlad ang buhay ng tao,”<sup>2</sup> na humahantong sa iba’t-ibang manipestasyon na minsan ay mapanganib at hindi naaayon sa nararapat at talagang totoo. Meron ding ilan na ang walang malay na pagpapatupad ng mahahalagang bagay, gaya ng pagkakaroon ng pamilya o ang pagiging lalaki o babae o pagiging kasapi ng isang relihiyon, ang nagpapatakbo sa buhay nila. Mahalagang isaisip na ang nais bigyang diin dito ni Rodriguez ay ang kawalan ng malay sa paghahangad ng mga bagay na ito. Madali lang naman talagang mabigyan ng sagot ang tanong na “sino ako?” kung nababalot na sa katiyakan ng mahahalagang bagay ang isang indibidwal. Ngunit ano na ang magiging lagay ng tao kapag gumuho ang mga katiyakang ito? Ano ang mangyayari kapag nakasagupa ng mga kritikal na panunuri ang aking mga batayang pananalig? Ayon kay Rodriguez, malalagay ang tao sa laro ng pagkalahanganin.<sup>3</sup> At bagamat may pasya ang tao na lisan ito at humanap ng mga panibagong katiyakan, mahalaga rin ang pasya na manatili sa laro ng pagkalahanganin. Ito ay dahil sa paghahanap ng katuwiran sa kalagayang ito, dito makikita ng tao ang kaliwanagan upang mabigyan ng sagot ang tanong na sino ako.

Kapag ang tanong ay nagsisimula sa ano, gaya ng “ano ang bato?”, tumutukoy ito sa isang obheto, maaaring itong bato o ang bato sa kabuuan. Ngunit kapag ang tanong ay “sino ako?”, hindi ito ganoon kadalang sagutin gaya ng ano ang bato sapagkat tila bagang hindi madaling tukuyin ang obheto ng ako gaya ng pagtukoy sa isang bato. Kaya nga ayon kay Rodriguez, “Hindi angkop sabihin ito ang ako at may ganitong tiyak na katangian.”<sup>4</sup> Sa halip, dapat tignan ang tanong na sino ako sa balangkas ng persona sapagkat “persona lamang ang tinutukoy ng ‘sino’.”<sup>5</sup> Sa pamamagitan nito, makikita na ang persona na tinutukoy ng tanong ay isang “dinamikong X— isang malaya at mulat na ako na hindi maiuuwi sa pagkabagay.”<sup>6</sup> Ano ang ibig sabihin nito? Ayon kay Rodriguez, nagpapahayag ito na tao lang “ang dinamismong kumikilos ayon sa malayang kalooban at may pagmamalay sa sarili. At dahil dito, naiiba ang tao sa mga ibang nagpepresensiya.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Agustin Martin Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014), 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Kapansin-pansin na ang balangkas na ito ayon sa pag-iintindi sa tao o sa tao bilang persona ay nakasentro sa tao bilang nakatatanda. Ito ay naglalarawan lamang ng tao na marunong nang magpasya o manalig o meron ng wastong pagmamalay sa sarili. Ngunit ang mga aspetong ito ay mga bagay na maaaring wala pa sa kamalayan ng isang bata o kung mayroon man, ito ay bagay na naaayon lang sa kung ano ang inilatag na posibilidad ng kanyang mga magulang o ng kung sinuman ang nangangalaga sa kanya. Ito ay dahil hindi pa ganap na sumisibol ang awtonomiya ng mga batang walang muwang, maging ang kanilang kakayanang magpahayag ng sarili. Halimbawa na lamang ang mga sanggol na wala pang kamalayan para magpasya o manalig, o mga paslit na wala pang tumpak na pagmamalay sa sarili. Ang iba pa nga, gaya ni Tamar Schapiro, ay kawalan ng awtonomiya ang binibigay na katangiang nagtatakda sa pagiging bata.<sup>8</sup> Dahil rin dito, sila ang mas nangangailangan ng masusing pag-antabay at pagkilala. Gaya nga ng sinabi ni Tim Fowler, ang mga bata ay higit na mahina at madaling mahimok.<sup>9</sup> Sapagkat malinaw na mga tao na sila na meron ding kakayahang magpresensiya, lumalabas na kinakailangan ng mas malawak na pag-unawa sa tao at sa persona sa ibayo ng iminungkahi ni Rodriguez. Gaya nga ng sinabi ni John Wall, “Ang pagpapakatao sa kabataan ay nakabatay sa pagpapakabata ng sangkatauhan.”<sup>10</sup>

Dumako naman tayo sa pagtalakay ni Rodriguez sa kapalaran ng tao na magpapalinaw rin sa kalagayan ng maraming mga batang walang muwang bilang naisantabi at binawian. Kung ang konsepto ni Rodriguez ng tao at persona ay nakatali sa ideya ng kalayaan at awtonomiya, mga bagay na lumilitaw na sinasandalang dalumat ng kanyang pilosopikal na balangkas, ang kanya namang pagtalakay sa kapalaran ng tao ay patungkol sa mga bagay na maaaring magbigay hangganan at posibilidad sa kalayaan at awtonomiya na ito. Kaya kapag tinignan natin ang kapalarang ito sa aspeto ng mga bata, mas pinapalinaw nito ang kalikasan ng mga bata na nag-uudyok ng mas matinding pangangailangan kumpara sa mga taong nakatatanda. Ano nga ba ang kapalaran? Ayon kay Rodriguez, “ito ang aspeto ng pagdirito ng tao na nagbabalangkas ng kaniyang kongkretong pagdirito—sa pisikal, sikolohikal, at espiritwal na elemento ng kaniyang pagmemeron.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tamar Schapiro, “What Is a Child?,” in *Ethics*, 109 (1999), 715–716.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Fowler, *Liberalism, Childhood and Justice: Ethical Issues in Upbringing* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2020), 11.

<sup>10</sup> John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 35. Salin ng may akda. Orihinal: “The humanization of childhood depends on the childization of humanity.”

<sup>11</sup> Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan*, 78.

## 216 KABATAANG WALANG MUWANG

Ang pagsasakatawan ang isa sa mga aspeto ng kapalaran ng tao na nagbibigay hangganan at posibilidad sa kanya sapagkat dahil sa pagsasakatawan, “mayroong mga tiyak na hangganan ang ako.”<sup>12</sup> Mahalagang kasangkapan ng pagsasakatawan ang kasarian, isang bagay na mariing binigyang pansin rin ni Rodriguez.<sup>13</sup> Halimbawa na lamang, kung ako ay pinanganak na lalaki, hindi parte ng aking posibilidad ang pagbubuntis kahit gaano ko pa ito naisin. Dagdag pa rito, ang mga kemikal na meron sa aking katawan bilang isang lalaki ay nagdudulot ng partikular na disposisyon at orientasyon sa pagpapatupad ng sarili at pagtahak sa mundo. Liban sa kasarian, kasama rin mismo ang porma at kaayusan ng katawan na nagdidikta ng aking hangganan at posibilidad. Hindi ako maaaring maging isang *flight attendant* kung hindi ako abot sa kailangan na tangkad. Hindi rin ako maaaring maging piloto kung ako’y bulag sa iilang kulay. Mayroong mga pagpapasya na bukas sa isang taong malakas at makisig ang pangangatawan kumpara sa isang taong may mahinang baga mula nang kanyang kapanganakan.

Isa pang aspeto ng kapalaran ng tao ay ang pagsasakasaysayan na tumutukoy sa “laro ng pagtatalaban ng mga pangyayari sa makahulugang pamumukadkad ng tao sa panahon na humuhubog sa kaniyang kongkretong pagdirito.”<sup>14</sup> Hindi maikakaila na may malaking bahagi ang mga pangyayari sa pangmundong kasaysayan, pambansang kasaysayan o maging pangyayari sa sariling komunidad upang hulmahin ang kapalaran ng isang tao. Isipin nalang natin ang di mabilang na mga lalaki at babaeng dinala sa kanya-kanya nilang tungkulin dahil sa pandaigdigang digmaang dumaan. Ganoon din, di-mabilang na Pilipino ang tinahak ang isang partikular na gampanin (na sa marami ay nauwi sa pagbubuwis ng buhay) dulot ng batas militar na namutawi sa bansa noong nanunungkulan si Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. bilang presidente. Iba ang kapalaran ng isang tao na pinanganak sa isang marangyang pamilya na ang yaman ay dulot ng kayamanan ng kanyang bansa kumpara sa isang tao na galing sa naghihirap na pamilya na ang kahirapan ay dulot ng kanilang mapanakal na gobyerno. Minsan pa nga, hindi kailangan ng isang malakihang pangyayari sa kasaysayan kundi maski ang pagpili ng iba para sa ako ay maaaring magpakita kung paano ang pagsasakasaysayan ay lumilitaw sa iba’t-ibang nibel ng buhay tao. Halimbawa na lamang ay ang aking mga magulang na pinili akong paaralin ng hayskul sa seminaryo, isang bagay na labis kong ikinasasama ng loob noon. Ngunit dahil rin dito, natuklasan ko ang pilosopiya na kalaunan ay nagbigay sa akin ng kakaibang kahulugan upang bigyang direksyon ang

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

aking buhay. Ngayon na nasa punto ako kung saan isinasabuhay ko ang bokasyon ng pamimilosopiya, hindi ko lubos makita ang sarili ko na gumagawa ng iba pa. Ngunit, minsan ay pinagmumuni-munihan ko rin kung hindi ginawa ng mga magulang ko ang pagpapasya nila noon para sa akin, naitatanong ko: nasaang propesyon kaya ako ngayon? Nakikita ko rin kaya ang sarili ko na may galak sa aking ginagawa kahit na marahil wala ako sa larangan ng pamimilosopiya? Hindi man malinaw ang tunay na kasagutan, ang halimbawang ito ay nagpapakita na ang pagsasakasaysayan ay nagpapahiwatig ng umiiral na kawalang katiyakan sa buhay ng tao. Gaya nga ng sinabi ni Rodriguez, “Ayaw man niya o gusto, tinapon ang tao sa mundo.”<sup>15</sup>

Ang ikatlo at huling aspeto ng kapalaran ay ang sistema ng pagpapahalaga. Ayon kay Rodriguez, ito ang “sistemang umiiral sa kalooban ng tao na nagbibigay orientasyon sa kung ano ang nanaisin, kamumuhian, iibigin, o kapupuotan.”<sup>16</sup> Namumulat ang tao sa sistema na ito mula pa lamang sa kanyang unang pagdirito kung saan ito ang nagbibigay hugis sa kanyang pagpapasiya at pagkilos. Ito ang sistemang nagpapamulat sa tao sa halaga ng pagkain, maging bilang tagapagbigay ng nutrisyon sa katawan o ng kasarapang pangkatawan. Iba’t iba ang sistema ng pagpapahalaga kaya may mga taong handang ibuwis ang buhay para sa kanilang pamilya samantalang meron namang ang tanging halaga lamang ay ang patuloy na makaranas ng kasarapan ang sarili. Anumang sistema ng halaga ang piliin ng tao, ito ay hindi sumusulpot galing sa wala at tila ba sinusunggaban lang ng kung sino ang magnais. Malaking parte nito ay nakasalalay “sa magulang, sa pamilya, sa komunidad na kinalakihan, sa edukasyon, sa kapanahunan, at sa dinaanang personal at panlipunang kasaysayan”<sup>17</sup> ng sinuman. Kaya nga gamit ang lenteng ito, maaaninagan na ang pagsasakatawan at pagsasakasaysayan ng tao ay may malaking impluwensiya sa sistema ng pagpapahalaga na kanyang babalingan.

Ngunit ibig sabihin ba nito ay wala ng kalayaan ang tao sapagkat ang kanyang kapalaran ay inihabi na ng mga aspetong nabanggit? Hindi nagbigay ng depinitibong sagot si Rodriguez rito, aminadong may kahirapan ang tanong na ito. Pero mayroong isang tiyak na maaaring masabi ukol sa kalayaan ng tao: “na sa bawat sandali ng buhay, nararanasan niya ang pangangailangang magpasiya.”<sup>18</sup> Itinakda man o hindi ang kanyang pagpapasiya, malinaw sa tao na anuman ang pasiya na tahakin niya, mayroon itong kapangyarihan na lumikha ng kanyang kapalaran. Ngunit

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

ang tao ay hindi lang tao na nag-iisa: isa itong ako na nagpepresensiya kasama ang ibang kapwa-meron. Mayroong sakop na laro sa pagpepresensiyang ito: ito ang laro ng mga nagtatalabang presensiya at laro ng sariling pagpepresensiya. At ayon kay Rodriguez, nakasalalay sa larong ito ang pag-unawa sa mabuti at nararapat ng bawat ngayon at dito: “larong nakasalalay sa tawag ng kapwa meron ayon sa nararapat at makatarungan sa kanilang pagmemeron, at sa tawag ng sarili batay sa makatarungan sa sariling pagmemeron.”<sup>19</sup>

Ngunit paano eksaktong matutukoy ng larong ito ang makatarungan at nararapat? Nasa meron ang buod ng laro, ngunit hindi malinaw ang nais tumbukin dito ni Rodriguez. Binanggit niya na mayroong maaaring magawa ang tao sa kapwa tao na “mapangwasak o malikhain kaugnay sa pagmemeron ng mga nagmemerong ito,”<sup>20</sup> ngunit hindi siya nagbanggit ng malinaw na batayan kung papaano matutukoy kung ang isang gawain ay tunay bang mapangwasak o malikhain. Kung mayroong takdang kalikasan ang tao kung saan ito ang nagtatakda kung ang isang gawain ay tumutulong ba sa kanyang likas na paglago, maaari itong maging isang malinaw na batayan. Ngunit tahasang ipinahayag ni Rodriguez na ayaw niyang “makulong sa ideya na may takdang pagka-ano ang mga umiiral sa meron”<sup>21</sup> sapagkat maaari itong maging “sanhi ng pagkasarado ng tao sa hiwaga ng pagpepresensiya ng mga meron”<sup>22</sup> kaya naman para sa tao, nararapat na “ang laro ng presensiya ng mga nagprepresensiya lamang ang kanyang batayan ng nararapat at mabuti.”<sup>23</sup> Malinaw sa mga siping nabanggit na mariing itinatangi ni Rodriguez ang esensyalismo bilang metapisikal na balangkas ng mabuti at nararapat.

Hindi rin malinaw kung ito bang batayan ng mabuti at nararapat ay may sariling obhetibong reyalidad na malaya mula sa saloobin ng tao o isang batayan na may kanya-kanyang timpla ayon sa kung sino ang tumitingin. Ang tila malinaw kay Rodriguez ay kung papaanong ang iba’t-ibang ako ay may sari-sariling pag-unawa sa mabuti at nararapat na maaaring magbangaan at makaapekto sa kilos ng buhay tao. Ang resulta nito ay ang hindi maiiwasang pagkakaiba-iba ng iba’t-ibang ako sa pag-unawa ng mabuti at nararapat, bagay na inasahan rin ni Rodriguez. Ika nga niya, “Dahil may hangganan ang kakayahan ng bawat taong bigkasin ang walang-

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

hanggang laro ng pagpepresensiya ng katalagahan, walang likas na nakakalamang sa pag-unawa sa mabuti o totoo.”<sup>24</sup>

Ibinigay niyang halimbawa ang pagbabanggaan ng mga taong may modernong pag-unawa sa pag-unlad at mabuting buhay at mga taong may katutubong pag-unawa sa makataong buhay. Ang isang grupo may pagkiling sa batas ng estado at kung papaanong maaaring magamit ito upong mag-ari ng lupa. Samantalang ang mga katutubo naman, ang lupa ay bukal ng buhay. Hindi ito bagay na pwedeng ariin kundi tinatanggap bilang biyaya. Mula sa pagtinging ito, kumikilos ang mga katutubo na nakaayon sa pagtinging ito: may paggalang sa katangian ng lupa, sa kalikasan ng lupa at paggalang sa kalooban ng nagbibiyaya sa lupa. Ngunit sa ganitong klaseng banggaan ng pag-uunawa, kung sino ang mas may kapangyarihan—kung sino ang mas dominanteng katuwiran—ang madalis nananaig sa huli. Sa ganitong klase ng panghihimasok ng ibang mga patakaran ng pagpapaunlad ng buhay tao, “napipigilan ang mga katutubo sa pagpapatupad ng kanilang paraan ng pamumuhay na para sa kanila ay makatwiran at mabuti.”<sup>25</sup>

Ang pagtalakay ni Rodriguez ng kapalaran at mga aspeto nito ay mas lalong magpapalinaw kung bakit mas nangangailangan ng boses ang mga batang walang muwang sa multiberso ng katuwiran. Gaya nang nasabi na noong una, ang pagtalakay ni Rodriguez ng kapalaran ay naglalayong ipakita ang mga aspeto ng buhay na nagbibigay direksyon sa buhay tao na sa maraming pagkakataon ay hindi niya pinili o ginusto. Ngunit sinubukan ding balansehin ito ni Rodriguez sa pamamagitan ng pagkikila sa tao bilang isang ako na may kakayahang magpasiya, at dulot ng pagpapasiyang ito, ay isang tao na may kakayahan ding diktahan ang kanyang kapalaran. Gayunpaman, ang larawan na ito ng kapalaran ng tao ay sumasalamin uli ng kapalaran ng taong nakatatanda, isang ako na may kakayahan nang magpasiya sa uri ng kapalaran na ninanais niya. Kabaliktaran sa larawang ito ang kapalaran ng isang batang walang muwang.

Tignan muna natin ang pagsasakatawan sa nibel ng mga batang walang muwang. Mula pa lamang sa sinapupunan ng kanilang ina, ang pagsasakatawan ng mga sanggol ay lubos ng sumasailalim sa kilos at pagpapasiya ng ina. Kung ang ina ay pabaya, halimbawa siya ay lulong sa alak o paninigarilyo kahit na siya ay nagbubuntis, malaki ang magiging epekto nito sa pagsasakatawan ng kanyang sanggol. Maaaring magkaroon ng kapansanan ang bata, sa pisikal man o sa mental na aspeto, na dadalhin niya hanggang siya ay tumanda. Maaari rin namang ang ina ay walang bisyo ngunit sadyang nalugmok lang sa kahirapan kaya naman noong ang sanggol ay naging paslit, hindi ito nakakatanggap ng sapat na nutrisyon sa katawan,

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

## 220 KABATAANG WALANG MUWANG

kaya lumaki siyang laging mahina ang isip at katawan at madalas walang ganang mag-aral o matuto. Ang nais kong ipakita sa mga halimbawang ito ay kung papaano ang pagsasakatawan ng mga batang walang muwang ay lubos na sumasailalim sa poder ng magulang, madalas ina, at iba pang nangangalaga sa kaniya. Ang isang sanggol ay walang kakayanang magpasiya sa uri ng katawan na maibibigay sa kanya: malaking aspeto nito ay ayon sa magiging kilos at pasya ng kanyang mga magulang, lalo na ng kanyang ina. Sumasangayon ito sa nais ipunto ni Rodriguez sa pagtalakay niya ng pagsasakatawan sa buhay tao ngunit mayroong isang bagay na nais kong bigyang diin: ang nakatatanda ay kahit papaano may pagpapasiya kung papaano niya bibigyang ayos o pagbututihin ang kalagayan ng kanyang pagsasakatawan. Halimbawa, maaari siyang umiwas sa bisyo na nakakasira sa kanyang pangangatawan. Maaari siyang mag-ensayo upang pagbutihin ang pisikal niyang kalagayan at anyo. Maaari siyang magpumilit makapag-aral, sa kabila ng kahirapan at iba pang balakid, upang pagbutihin ang kanyang intelektwal na kalagayan, na mahalagang parte rin ng pagsasakatawan. Samantala, hindi saklaw ng mga batang walang muwang ang kakayanang magpasiya ng ganito. Ito ay dahil wala pa silang kakayahang magpasiya – sa anumang makabuluhang pakahulugan.

Nalalagay rin sila sa parehong sitwasyon pagdating sa aspeto ng pagsasakasaysayan. Anuman ang maganap sa pandaigdigang, nasyonal o lokal na kasaysayan, ang mga batang walang muwang ay lubos na sumasailalim sa impluwensiya ng mga ito. Ang kanilang pamumukadkad sa panahon ay nasa kapangyarihan ng lahat ng pumapaligid sa kanila, ngunit wala silang boses sa pamumukadkad na ito. At dahil rin sa kawalang kapangyarihan ng mga batang walang muwang, hindi madalas nakikita kung papaano nahuhulma ang pagpipilian ng nakatatanda ayon sa kasaysayang kinalagyan niya noong siya ay bata pa. Halimbawa, iba ang magiging bukas na pagpipilian ng isang nakatatandang laki at kasalukuyang dumaranas ng hirap kumpara sa isang nakatatandang hindi nakaranas nito noong kabataan niya. Ito ay nagpapahiwatig kung gaano kahalagang tignan ang mga polisiya at desenyong lipunan, at kung paano nito isinasaalang-alang (o hindi) ang kapakanan ng mga batang walang muwang.

Kapag tinungo naman natin ang sistema ng pagpapahalaga, mas lalong lilitaw ang reyalidad ng kawalan ng pasiya ng mga batang walang muwang. Liban sa pagpapahiwatig ng pangangailangan sa pamamagitan ng pag-iyak, wala na atang iba pang malinaw na senyales ang sanggol na meron siyang iba pang pangunahing pangangailangan. Ngunit kung tanging ang pag-iyak lang at ang pagtigil nito ang tanging magiging basehan natin ng mga bagay na mahalaga para sa interes niya, lubos itong magiging kulang upang maging palatandaan ng mabuti at nararapat para sa kaniya. Kapag dumako naman tayo sa mga batang paslit, maaaring ang ilan sa kanila ay

marunong nang bumigkas o magsabi nang kanilang pangangailangan, ngunit marahil maging ito ay hindi awtomatikong tatanggapin ng magulang na pagpapahiwatig ng mabuti at nararapat sa kanila. Isang dahilan rito ay ang reyalidad na ang mga pagpapasiyang ito ay madalas idinikta o impluwensiya rin ng kanilang mga magulang o kung sinuman ang nangangalaga sa kanila. Halimbawa na lamang ang pagkahumaling ng mga batang paslit sa matatamis na pagkain gaya ng kendi o sorbetes. Marahil ay minsan pinagbibigyan ng magulang ang kanilang anak na kumain ng sorbetes tuwing naghahanap siya nito, ngunit kung palaging pupunan ng magulang ang paghahanap ng anak ng sorbetes, hindi rin naman ito magiging maganda para sa kalusugan niya. Kaya hindi magiging akma na tignan ang sistema ng pagpapahalaga ng isang paslit base lamang sa isinasambit niya sapagkat ang sistemang ito ay ipinataw lang sa kanya ng kanyang mga magulang at iba pang nakapaligid sa kaniya, o kung ayon man ito sa kanyang kagustuhan, hindi sinasalamin ng pagpapasyang ito ang tunay na mabuti at nararapat para sa kanya. Ito ang tinatawag kong laro ng pagkabata, na nakabase sa kawalan ng kalayaan at pagpapasiya ng mga batang walang muwang o kung meron mang pagpapasiya, ito ay hilaw at tunay na nangangailangan pa ng gabay.

Matapos ang pagpapaliwanag natin ng laro ng sarili kung saan nakapaloob ang kapalaran ng tao at mga aspeto nito, malinaw na bagama't may ilang pagkakapareho ang laro ng sarili sa nibel ng nakatatanda at nibel ng mga batang walang muwang, mayroon ding napakalaking kaibahan, at ito ay ang kawalan ng mga batang walang muwang ng kakayanang magpasiya. Sa susunod na bahagi, ipapaliwanag ko kung paano nakadikit ang pagka-lehitimo ng multiberso ng katuwiran sa laro ng sarili, at kung papaanong maaaring mabago ang balangkas nito kapag isinasaalang-alang na natin ang kapakanan ng mga bata.

### **Ang Multiberso ng Katuwiran**

Kung may malaking pagkakaparepareho ang kapalaran ng bawat tao, at dahil dito may pangkalahatang pag-unawa sa katalagahan at sa kung ano ang mabuti at mahalaga, maaaring maging katanggap-tanggap ang isang uniberso ng katuwiran na sasakop sa lahat. Ngunit gaya nga ng ipinaliwanag ni Rodriguez ukol sa kapalaran ng tao, hindi ganito ang reyalidad. Dahil nga sa kung paano nagtatalaban ang iba't-ibang aspeto ng kapalaran ng tao, at kung papaano naipatupad ang pagpapasiya sa gitna ng kapalarang ito, ang bawat ako ay may kanya-kanyang pagtingin sa kung ano ang mabuti at nararapat para sa kaniya. Ang bawat tao ay may kanya-kanyang pangangatwiran sa lahat ng kanilang ginagawa. Kaya naman ayon kay Rodriguez, "may katwiran ang lahat ng gawain ng tao-naaangkop lagi ito sa

katwiran ng kumikilos.”<sup>26</sup> Dahil dito, nangangailangan ng multiberso ng katuwiran sapagkat “ito lamang ang nagtitiyak na hindi nakukulong ang tao sa mga makitid na sistema ng katwiran.”<sup>27</sup> Naririto sa multiberso ng katuwiran ang pagkakataon upang maintindihan ang katalagahan ayon sa ibang katwiran na maaaring salungat o malayo sa kinalakihang paniniwala.

Lubos na tumitindi ang pangangailangan na kilalanin ang multiberso ng katuwiran, dahil sa ating lumiliit na mundo mayroong nananaig na dominanteng katuwiran na nagiging mapangwasak at isinasantabi ang maliliit o walang kapangyarihang katwiran. Dahil sa pag-aakalang ang kanilang katwiran ang tanging tama at mabuti, hindi nag-aalinlangan ang nasa kapangyarihan na ipataw ang katwirang ito sa lipunan. Ngunit makatarungan ba ito? Ayon kay Rodriguez, ang katarungan ay “ang katangian ng kaugnayan sa pagitan ng mga tao kung saan ginagalang at hindi hinahadlangan ng bawat isa ang karapatan ng bawat isang isatupad ang sarili ayon sa nauunawaan nila bilang mabuti.”<sup>28</sup> Kaya nga, di-makatarungan ang anumang pagkilos ng hindi paggalang sa karapatang isatupad ang sarili ayon sa pagkaunawa ng bawat ako. Halimbawa na lamang rito ang binabanggit ni Rodriguez na “pananalakay ng Kanluraning katwiran sa bawat bahagi ng mundo”<sup>29</sup> na humahantong sa bangga sa pagitan ng batas na hango sa Kanluraning katwiran at ang katwiran ng mga katutubo. Ang halimbawang ito ay pagpapakita ng kawalan ng katarungan sapagkat sa pagkakataong ito, pilit ipinapataw ang isang sistema ng pagpapahalaga at pagpapatupad ng buhay na banyaga sa katutubong katwiran. Kaya kung ang nais ay isang tunay na makatarungang lipunan, kailangang maging batid sa “suliranin ng mga naisantabing katwiran at unawain ang mga posibilidad ng pagiging makatarungan sa mga taong naisantabi.”<sup>30</sup> Ang isa sa mga pundamental na hakbang para magawa ito ay ang mabigyan ang bawat katwiran, lalo na ng mga dehado at naisantabi, ng espasyong makilahok sa diskurso. Ayon kay Rodriguez, para masabing makatarungan ang diskurso, dapat mayroong malayang pakikibahagi ang “lahat ng madadamay (o ang kanilang tunay na kinatawan na maaaring magsalita para sa kanila gamit ang kanilang katuwiran) nang marating ang mga desisyon nila sa isang malayang pagbabahagian ng pag-unawa sa mabuti at nararapat.”<sup>31</sup> At dahil nga may kanya-kanyang dala ng pagtanaw sa nararapat at mabuti ang bawat ako, “hindi nagwawakas ang diskurso at

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

may katangiang pang-ngayon ang mga desisyong nararating sa prosesong ito.”<sup>32</sup>

Ngunit paano mabubuo ang isang makatarungang lipunan ayon sa mga bagay na nabanggit? Hindi maaari na hayaan lamang ang bawat katuwiran na mahayag sapagkat, gaya nga ng nabanggit, di maiiwasang magbangaan ang marami sa mga ito, at kung titignan nga natin ang kasaysayan ng mga ganitong pangyayari, madalas ang mapaniil na dominanteng katuwiran pa rin ang nananaig. Ayon kay Rodriguez, ang kailangan ay “isang sistemang makatwiran na magiging batayan ng pagtatakda ng mga batas at patakaran ng pamamahala na naaangkop at katanggap-tanggap sa lahat ng kasapi.”<sup>33</sup> Ngunit paano magagarantiya na ang katwirang ito ay magiging katanggap-tanggap sa lahat? Dito na humiram si Rodriguez ng pilopikal na balangkas mula kay John Rawls. Mahirap ipagsama-sama ang mga tao na nanggagaling sa magkakaibang pananalig, ayon kay Rawls. Dahil nga naman ang mga pananalig na ito ay madalas malaki ang parte sa pagbuo ng kanilang pagkatao, hindi ito madaling isinusuko. Ngunit ayon kay Rawls, hindi kailangan na magmula sa mga pananalig na ito ang basehan ng isang makatarungang lipunan kundi sa isang uri ng hustisya na maaaring magsilbing basehan ng isang politikal na kasunduan sa pagitan ng mga mamamayang malaya at may pagkakapantay-pantay.<sup>34</sup> Namumutawi sa partikular na uri ng hustisya sa kaisipan ni Rawls ay ang prinsipyo ng neyutralidad. Kung ang nais ay isang liberal na lipunan, marapat lamang na hindi papaburan ng estado ang anumang komprehensibong doktrina at ang mga karampatang dalumat nito ng kung ano ang mabuti.<sup>35</sup> Gayunpaman, hindi rin dapat pipigilan ng estado ang pagsasabuhay ng mga mamamayan sa mga doktrinang ito. Kaya naman, nasa sentro rin ng liberal na pag-iisip ang konsepto ng awtonomiya na tumutukoy sa abilidad ng isang indibidwal na magpasya para sa kanyang sarili. Liban sa prinsipyo ng niyutralidad, isa pang pangunahing konsepto sa liberalismo, lalo na yaong hango kay Rawls, ay ang ideya ng pampublikong katuwiran. Ayon kay Rawls, may tatlong paraang para masabing pampublikong katuwiran ang isang katuwiran: ito ay katuwiran ng publiko; ang paksa nito ay ang kapakanan ng publiko at mga usapin ng hustisya; at ang likas at nilalaman nito ay pampubliko, na ang ibig sabihin ay hindi ito umaapela sa mga etikal, pilosopikal o relihiyosong pananaw.<sup>36</sup> Gamit ang

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>34</sup> John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. by Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 394.

<sup>35</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press; 1993), 189.

<sup>36</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 213–215.

prinsipyo ng neyutralidad at pampublikong katwiran, malinaw kung bakit sa ganitong porma ng hustisya mahalaga ang isang malayang diskurso upang humantong sa “mga makatwirang prinsipyo ng pagsasama na katanggap-tanggap sa lahat anumang uri ng sistema ng pagpapahalaga ang kanilang pinagmumulan.”<sup>37</sup>

Ngayong naipaliwanag na natin ang multiberso ng katwiran at kung bakit kailangan ito para sa isang makatarungang lipunan, maaari na nating suriin kung ang larawang pinapakita ba nito ay angkop para sa mga batang walang muwang. At sa tingin ko, ang multiberso ng katwiran, bilang isang balangkas, ay hindi sapat upang bigyang pansin ang laro ng pagkabata. Ito ay dahil sa makailan-ilan ding dahilan. Una, hindi ito angkop sapagkat ipinagpapalagay nito na ang bawat tao ay mayroon ng katwiran na ayon sa kanilang pagtingin sa tama at mabuti. Ngunit ang mga batang walang muwang ay hindi pa lubos na lumago upang magkaroon sila ng kakayahang ito. Kahit na sa mga paslit na kaya nang makipag-usap at ipahayag ang kanilang mga kagustuhan, walang nakatatandang mag-iisip na kailangang laging galangin ang anumang banggitin at nais nilang gawin hango sa palagay nilang tama at mabuti. Kalakip nitong unang dahilang nabanggit kung bakit may kulang rin sa pag-unawa ni Rodriguez ukol sa katarungan. Ito ay dahil nakatuon lamang ang pag-unawang ito sa nakatatanda. Maaalalang nakasentro sa pagpapahayag ng awtonomiya ang depinisyong ibinigay ni Rodriguez ukol sa katarungan. Ngunit, pagdating sa mga bata na wala pang malinaw na awtonomiya, hindi aangkop ang pagsasatupad ng sarili ayon sa sariling pag-unawa ng tama at mabuti bilang batayan ng pagiging makatarungan. Hindi magiging kumpleto ang balangkas ng isang tunay na makatarungang lipunan na kumikilala sa multiberso ng katuwiran kung isasantabi nito mismo ang mga kasapi nito na hindi kayang makilahok sa diskurso. Hindi naman ibig sabihin nito na kailangan na nating iwaksi ang multiberso ng katuwiran bilang balangkas patungo sa makatarungang lipunan. Sa palagay ko, makakatulong pa rin ito kapag inuunawa natin ang pinanggagalingan ng mga hindi sakop ng dominanteng katwiran, lalo na yaong naisantabi at binawian. Gayunpaman, paano ito maaaring mabago ng laro ng pagkabata?

Sapagkat wala ngang awtonomiya at pagpapasiya ang mga batang walang muwang, madaling masapawan ang kanilang kapakanan ng katwiran ng nakatatanda. Sila ang grupo ng tao na hindi makakapagsabi ng kanilang hinaing o ni hindi nila alam ang ilang mga bagay na kailangan nilang idaing sa lipunan. Wala pa silang ganap at komprehensibong pagtingin sa nararapat at mabuti kaya madali rin silang mahimok at maabuso.

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<sup>37</sup> Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan*, 167.

Nagbigay na ako ng ilang mga katangian na pumapaloob sa mga “batang walang muwang,” kagaya ng kakulangan ng awtonomiya at kakayahang magpasiya.<sup>38</sup> Mahalaga rito ang katangian na kawalan ng muwang, sapagkat hindi lahat ng bata ay walang muwang. Maraming kabataan ang malinaw na meron ng kakayahang magpasiya, makipagkatuwiran, at magpahayag ng kanilang pangangailangan. Gayunpaman, hindi ako sang-ayon na ang mga kakayahang ito ay lubos ng umiiral sa kanila na hindi na nila kailangan pa ng gabay, o maging pagtatama, mula sa nakatatanda na iniisip ang kanilang kapakanan. Halimbawa na lamang, may malinaw na pagkukulang ang isang lipunan na kinokonsente ang mga batang pito o sampung taong gulang pa lamang na manigarilyo, o uminom ng alak. Kahit pa sabihin na sarili nila itong pagpapasiya, hindi maikakaila na hindi ito dapat pahintulutan sapagkat hindi pa nila lubos naiintindihan ang maaaring maging resulta ng kanilang ginagawa. Isa sa malaking pagtitibay rito—na hango sa natuklasan ng siyensya—ay ang katotohanan na ang mga batang nasa ganitong edad ay hindi pa lubos na umuusbong ang parte ng kanilang utak na tinatawag na *prefrontal cortex*, bagay na responsable sa tamang pagpapalano, pagpapasya, pagkokontrol ng emosyon, at pangangatuwiran. Andoon na ang istruktura ngunit hindi pa ganap na umuusbong ang kakayahan ng parte ng utak na ito.<sup>39</sup>

Ngunit kung mapapatunayan man na mayroon ng mga batang may awtonomiya at malinaw na pagpapasiya, ibig sabihin ba nito ay hindi na maaaring gumana ang aking argumento? Malinaw na hindi, sapagkat kahit na tulutan ko ang ideya na meron ng sapat na awtonomiya at pangangatuwiran ang ilang mga bata (bagay na ipinakita kong kailangan

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<sup>38</sup> Malinaw na ang argumentong ilalahad ko ay maaari ring magamit sa ibang grupo ng tao na masasabing natanggalan o binawian din ng mga nasabing kakayanan, kagaya ng mga taong may partikular na kapansanan, mga bilanggo, atbp. Ngunit pinili kong pagtuunan ang isyu ng mga batang walang muwang sapagkat di gaya ng mga grupong nabanggit, mas unibersal ang lapat ng aking argumento sapagkat lahat ng tao ay dumadaan sa estado ng pagiging batang walang muwang. Ikalawa, may malaking kaibahan ang kawalan ng awtonomiya para sa mga batang walang muwang kumpara sa ibang grupong nabanggit, gaya halimbawa ng mga bilanggo. Para sa mga batang walang muwang, ang kawalan ng awtonomiya ay natural, dulot ng pangangailangan ng taong magmula sa ganong estado patungo sa estado na sumibol na ang kakayahang magpasya. Dahil sa natural ito kaya kinakailangan na may magbigay boses sa pangangailangan nila. Sa kaso ng mga bilanggo, ang kawalan nila ng awtonomiya ay resulta ng hustisya, at ang pagbibigay ng awtonomiya ay magiging paglabag sa tawag ng hustisya. Hindi ko sinasabi na wala ng ibang kawangis na argumento na maaaring mailahad para sa kanila, ngunit kung meron man, ito ay nangangailangan na ng isang hiwalay na pagpapaliwanag at paglalahad kumpara sa argumentong ilalahad ko rito. Nagpapasalamat ako sa di-kilalang tagasuri ng papel na binanggit ang pagkilala sa mga nasabing grupo.

<sup>39</sup> B. J. Casey, Nim Tottenham, Conor Loston, and Sarah Durston, “Imaging the Developing Brain: What Have We Learned about Cognitive Development?,” in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 9 (2005), 104–110.

pang bigyan ng malinaw na ebidensiya), hindi pa rin maikakaila na mayroong estado ng pagkabata kung saan ang bata ay walang kamuwang-muwang: mga bata sa sinapupunan, mga sanggol, at mga batang paslit na dahil sa edad ay hindi pa natututong bumigkas ng salita o pangungusap. Sila ang pinakapinatutungkulan ko sa katagang “kabataang walang muwang.” Kaya naman ang layunin ko sa paggamit ng katagang ito ay upang tukuyin ang estado ng tao—partikular na sa kabataan—na hindi limitado sa iilang kultura o kasaysayan, kundi aspeto ng pagkatao na natural na pagdadaan ng sinumang tatanda.<sup>40</sup>

Kaya kapag isinaisip natin ang pinakapinatutungkulan ng nasabing kataga, madali nating makikita kung bakit madaling maisantabi ang kanilang kapakanan. Sa kasalukuyang panahon, tila namumutawi ang katwiran ng nakatatanda na humahantong sa pagsasantabi sa mga batang walang muwang. Magbibigay ako ng tatlong halimbawa na magpapakita kung papaanong ang katwiran ng nakatatanda ay kumikilos bilang dominanteng katwiran na isinasantabi ang kapakanan ng maraming kabataan.

Una na rito ay ang usapin ng aborsyon. Kahit na hindi pa man legal ang aborsyon sa Pilipinas, dumarami na ang mga taong nagnanais na maging legal ito sa bansa. At isa sa madalas na pangangatwiran para maging legal ito ay dahil ito ang pasiya ng magulang, madalas ang ina. Kaya nga tinatawag rin ang posisyon na nangangatuwiran sa pagiging legal o maging moral ng aborsyon bilang *pro-choice*. Ipinapahiwatig sa partikular na tawag sa posisyong ito na dapat ang awtonomiya ng tao ang pinaka-dapat papahalagahan. Madaling mahihimok ang lipunan na panigan ang posisyong ito kung ang tanging isinasaalang-alang lamang ay ang katuwiran ng nakatatanda. Gayun din, mahirap makita ang karapatan ng sanggol na mabuhay kung ang tanging nangingibabaw sa diskurso ay ang tugunan ang pasya at irespeto ang kalayaan ng nakatatanda. Ngunit ito rin ang dahilan kung bakit sa usaping ito madaling ilarawan ang katuwiran ng nakatatanda bilang dominanteng katuwiran na naniniil sa mahihinang taong nasa sinapupunan na ang tanging pag-asa lamang na mabuhay ay ayon sa awa o pagmamahal ng iba. Maging si Rodriguez ay tinitignan ang kamatayan ng tao bilang “pinakamalinaw at masaklap na larawan ng kawalang-katarungan sa mundo”<sup>41</sup> ngunit binanggit niya ito sa konteksto ng lumalalang pagbabago ng klima at kung paano ito humahantong sa kamatayan ng maraming mahihirap. Ngunit kung ang aborsyon ay pagkitil ng buhay ng bata sa sinapupunan, bagay na sinasang-ayunan maging ng mga pilosopong

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<sup>40</sup> Ang paglilinaw na ito ay hango sa komento ng isang di-kilalang tagasuri ng papel na inimitahan akong pagnilayan kung ang aking pananaw ba ng mga kabataang walang muwang ay isinasalamin lamang ang konteksto ng kulturang Pinoy o sa kasaysayan ng bansa, at hindi umiiral sa iibang kultura. Nagpapasalamat ako sa kanyang komento.

<sup>41</sup> Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan*, 128.

ipinaglalaman ang aborsyon,<sup>42</sup> lumalabas na ito ay epekto ng kawalang-katarungan para sa mga batang di pa kayang ipaglaban ang kanilang kapakanan.

Ikalawang halimbawa ay ang usapin ng diborsiyo. Kapag ito ang bagay na pinag-uusapan, madalas na pangangatwiran mula sa mga nagnanais nito ay kung paano nagpasiya ang mag-asawa na maghiwalay. Sa Kanluraning pananaw, legal sa kanila ang tinatawag na “no-fault divorce” kung saan maaaring piliing maghiwalay ng mag-asawa kahit na walang nagkamali sa kanila at sadya lamang na nais na nilang maghiwalay. Ngunit paano nga ba nakakaapekto ang diborsiyo sa kalagayan ng isang bata? Ayon sa isang pangmatagalang pag-aaral sa napakaraming Amerikanong pamilya na inabot ng labinlimang taon, natagpuan nina Paul Amato at Alan Booth na humigit-kumulang 70 porsyento ng mag-asawa ang naghihiwalay na walang masyadong alitan (*low-conflict*). Dagdag pa rito, nadiskubre rin nila na ang pagpapatuloy ng pagsasama ng mga mag-asawa sa isang *low-conflict marriage* ay lumalabas na mas makakabuti sa kanilang mga anak kumpara sa pagkasira ng kanilang pamilya.<sup>43</sup> Hindi lang ito ang pwedeng maging epekto ng diborsiyo sapagkat puede pa itong humantong sa pag-aasawa ng iba, kung saan maaaring magdulot ang panibagong family set-up na ito sa higit na pinsala. Halimbawa, kapag pinili ng bayolohikal na nanay na mag-asawang muli, lumalabas base sa isang pag-aaral sa UK, na higit sa walong beses na mas mataas ang posibilidad ng pang-aabuso sa bata kumpara kung siya ay naninirahan sa poder ng kanyang parehong tunay na magulang.<sup>44</sup> Sinasang-ayunan nito ang pahayag nina Martin Daly and Margo Wilson na base sa kanilang pag-aaral, “ang pagkakaroon ng step-parent ang lumilitaw na pinakamakapangyarihang salik kaugnay sa matinding pag-mamaltratong nararanasan ng isang bata.”<sup>45</sup> Kaya naman, lumalabas sa mga pag-aaral na ito kung paano nakapipinsala ang diborsiyo sa kapakanan ng bata. Kagaya ng aborsyon, mahirap makita ang paghuhugutan ng karapatan na ito kung ang namumutawing katwiran sa lipunan ay katwiran ng nakatatanda.

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<sup>42</sup> Ilan sa mga pilosopong ito ay sina Peter Singer at Judith Jarvis Thomson. Tignan ang mga sumusunod: Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 151–152; Judith J. Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (1971).

<sup>43</sup> Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Robert Whelan, *Broken Homes and Battered Children: A Study of the Relationship between Child Abuse and Family Type* (London: Family Education Trust, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *The Truth about Cinderella: A Darwinian View of Parental Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 7. Salin ng may akda. Orihinal: “Having a step-parent has turned out to be the most powerful epidemiological risk factor for severe child maltreatment yet discovered.”

Ang ikatlo at huling halimbawang aking ibibigay ay ang surogasya, na dumarami na ang nakikinabang ngayon. Sa Kanluraning kultura, dumarami ang mga parehong kasariang magkapareha na pinipiling magka-anak sa ganitong paraan. Ngunit dahil kailangan ng punla (*gametes*) ng babae upang makabuo ng anak, nangangailangan ng nasabing magkapareha (kung sila ay parehong lalaki) na bilhin ang punla na ito at bayaran ang babae na magbubuntis sa sanggol. Kapag naipanganak na, ibibigay sa magkapareha ang sanggol na wala ang kalinga ng kanyang ina. May kahalintulad na sistema pagdating rin sa magkaparehang babae, ngunit sa pagkakataong ito, semilya ng lalaki ang kanilang bibilhin. Minsan, hindi na kailangang magkapareha ang makinabang sa surogasya. Kung nais ng isang nakatatanda na magkaanak kahit na wala siyang asawa, at mayroon siyang pinansiyal na kakayahan, pwede niya na itong gawin sa pamamagitan ng surogasya. Madalas ang pagsasalarawan ng surogasya sa medya ay bilang isang himala ng teknolohiya. Ipinagdiriwang ito at madalas hindi nakikitaan ng kawalan ng katarungan. Maging ang ilang mga pilosopong pabor dito ay tinitignan ang surogasya sa lente ng kalayaang magkaanak, na para sa kanila ay may pangunahing halaga sa isang tunay na liberal na lipunan.<sup>46</sup> Ang iba pa nga ay umaapela sa tinatawag nilang karapatan na magkaanak kahit walang pakikipagtalik (*right to noncoital reproduction*) bilang dahilan para supurtahan ang surogasya.<sup>47</sup> Noon pa nga lang na dekada 70s, mayroon nang iilang sumusulong sa ideya ng malayang merkado ng mga sanggol (*free baby market*).<sup>48</sup> Ngunit ang laging wala sa mga argumentong ito ay ang pangangailangang tignan ang kapakanan at karapatan ng mga batang magiging produkto ng surogasya. Ang pagkabulag na ito ay dahil sa nananaig na katwiran ng nakatatanda sa lipunan. Kaya naman, di rin katakataka na may iilang pilosopo gaya ni David H. Smith na inihahambing ang surogasya sa pang-aalipin, sa kadahilanang may isang taong nagiging gamit lamang sa kagustuhan ng iba.<sup>49</sup> Sa nibel ng mga batang resulta ng surogasya, hindi ba may karapatan silang lumaki sa aruga ng kanilang mga tunay na magulang? Hindi ba natin gagalangin ang karapatang ito dahil lamang sa hindi nila kayang bigkasin ang kanilang pangangailangan? Mahalagang bigyang pansin ang tahasang paggamit ko dito ng mga salitang “tunay na

<sup>46</sup> John A. Robertson, *Children of Choice: Freedom and the New Reproductive Technologies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22–42.

<sup>47</sup> Kimberly M. Mutcherson, “Procreative Rights in a Postcoital World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reproductive Rights*, ed. by Leslie Francis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 171–174.

<sup>48</sup> Elisabeth M. Landes and Richard A. Posner, “The Economics of the Baby Shortage,” in *Journal of Legal Studies*, 7 (1978), 347.

<sup>49</sup> David H. Smith, “Wombs for Rent, Selves for Sale?,” in *Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*, 4 (1988), 34.

magulang,” na tumutukoy sa mga bayolohikal na magulang, sapagkat may mga taong maaaring tumayong mga magulang ng isang bata, gaya ng mga taong maaaring mag-ampon o mangalaga sa kanila.<sup>50</sup> Ngunit sa kabila nito, hindi pa rin maikakaila na ang diborsiyo man o ang surugasya ay isa pa ring kawalang-katarungan kahit pa ang batang maapektuhan nito ay sasailalim sa pangangalaga ng mga taong maaaring mag-ampon o mangalaga ng maayos sa kanila. Ang kawalang-katarungan ng isang bagay ay hindi mapagtatakpan ng anumang magandang kahihinatnan ng magiging biktima nito, kahit pa ang magandang resultang ito ay hindi mangyayari kung hindi naganap ang kawalang-katarungang nabanggit. Kaya naman, gaya nga ng sabi ni Rodriguez, “laging dapat may ibang kumakatawan sa mga binawian.”<sup>51</sup> Interesanteng tignan na meron na ring ilang pilosopo, gaya ni Anca Gheaus, na binibigyang katwiran ang pahayag na hindi makatarungan ang ilang pagsasagawa ng surogasya dahil hindi nito tinitignan ang pinakamabuti para sa kapakanan ng bata.<sup>52</sup>

Malinaw sa aking tatlong halimbawa na maraming pagkakataon kung saan ang mga batang walang muwang ay maituturing na binawian, mga taong “inagawan o binawian ng isang bagay”:<sup>53</sup> binawian ng buhay sa kaso ng aborsyon, binawian ng kabuuan ng pamilya sa kaso ng diborsiyo, at binawian ng presensiya at pagmamahal ng kanilang tunay na mga magulang sa kaso ng surogasya. Dagdag pa rito, ipinakita ng mga halimbawa kung papaanong ang pananaig ng nakatatandang katuwiran ay humahantong sa mga pagkilos na hindi makatarungan para sa mga batang walang muwang. Gaya nga ng binanggit ni Brenda Almond, “Ang pagkakatulad ng mga pasya ukol sa mga bata, nasa nibel man ng pagiging embrayo, sanggol o binatilyo’t dalagita, ay ayon sa pagkakaugat ng mga ito sa kagustuhan at pangangailangan ng nakatatanda.”<sup>54</sup> Dahil sa masyadong pagbibigay-diin sa kahalagahan ng pagpapasya ng mga nakatatanda, madaling naisasantabi ang kapakanan ng mga batang apektado ng mga pagpapasyang ito. Kaya naman,

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<sup>50</sup> Nagpapasalamat ako sa di-kilalang tagasuri ng papel na ibinahagi ang posibilidad na ito.

<sup>51</sup> Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan*, 157.

<sup>52</sup> Anca Gheaus and Christine Straehle, *Debating Surrogacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 180–184.

<sup>53</sup> Rodriguez, *May Laro ang Diskurso ng Katarungan*, 132.

<sup>54</sup> Brenda Almond, *The Fragmenting Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 123. Salin ng may akda. Orihinal: “What many of the choices made about children, whether at the embryonic, infant, or teenage stage, have in common is that they are grounded in the preferences and needs of adults.”

tama si Thomas H. Murray sa pagpapaalala na ang sobra-sobrang diing ibinibigay sa kakayahang magpasya ay nakakasira ng pamilya.<sup>55</sup>

Hindi maikakaila na ang isyu ng aborsyon, diborsiyo at surugasya ay malalaking paksa na binabalot ng kumplikadong mga argumento mula sa magkabilang-panig ng debate. Hindi ko man intensyon na tuldukan ang mga nasabing diskurso sa mga paksang ito, sa palagay ko ang argumentong aking inilalahad—na naglalayong bigyang-hustisya ang kapakanan at pangangailangan ng mga batang walang muwang—ay naghahain ng isang mapangwakas na rason (*decisive reason*) laban sa mga nabanggit na isyu. Para masabing ang isang rason ay mapangwakas, kinakailangan na ang rason na ito ay hindi kayang malamangan o mapangimbabawan ng anu pa mang konsiderasyon. Halimbawa na lamang, isa sa mga madalas na binibigay na ehemplo ng mapangwakas na rason ay moral na rason, at para matukoy natin na ang isang rason ay moral, kailangang nagpapahiwatig ito ng pagkilala sa isang bagay na may moral na halaga. Ibig sabihin nito, kapag merong moral na rason para iwasan ang isang bagay—halimbawa kapag ang bagay na yon ay lubos na makakapahamak ng maraming tao—walang anu pa mang hindi moral na rason (*non-moral reason*) ang maaaring makagapi sa nasabing rason. Kaya naman, sinasabi natin na hindi sapat na dahilan ang kumita ng pera kung ang kapalit nito ay ang kapahamakan ng karamihan.

Base sa aking inilalahad na argumento, aking ipinakita na ang mga isyung nabanggit—aborsyon, diborsiyo, at surugasya—ay mga bagay na nagdudulot ng kawalang-hustisya para sa mga batang walang muwang. At dahil ang hustisya ay isang bagay na may moral na halaga, ibig sabihin ang kawalan ng hustisya sa mga bagay na ito ay naghahain ng isang mapangwakas na rason laban sa kanila.

Ang kawalang-katarungang ito ang dahilan rin kung bakit pagdating sa mga batang walang muwang, hindi sapat ang prinsipyo ng neyutralidad at prinsipyo ng pampublikong katwiran ni Rawls, mga bagay na nakapaloob sa konsepto ng makatarungang lipunan ni Rodriguez, bilang mga tanging balangkas sa pagbuo ng isang makatarungang lipunan. Ito ay dahil kung nais nating lumago ng maayos ang mga kabataang ito, hindi pwedeng maging niyutral ang kung sinuman ang kakatawan o mangangalaga sa kapakanan nila, sapagkat sa napakaraming pagkakataon, kumikilos ang mga batang ito sa paraang ikapapahamak nila. Dagdag pa rito, ipinangatuwiran rin ni Tim Fowler na ang prinsipyo ng neyutralidad ay nagkakaproblema sapagkat maaari itong humantong sa mga hindi magandang resulta para sa mga bata, lalo na kung yaong kanilang mga magulang ay tinuturuan sila ng mga

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas H. Murray, *The Worth of a Child* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 36.

paniniwalang ikapapahamak nila<sup>56</sup> o di kaya ay kumikilos ang magulang sa paraan na ikapapahamak ng kanilang anak, katulad ng ilan na hindi nila pinababakunahan ang kanilang anak dahil sa kanilang relihiyosong paniniwala.

Kaya nga, nararapat lamang na mayroong kumatawan sa mga batang ito. Marahil isang tipikal na sagot kung sino ang dapat kumatawan sa mga batang ito ay ang kanila mismong magulang. Ngunit kung napansin na ninyo sa mga nabanggit na mga halimbawa, ang mga kawalang-katarungang ito ay dahil mismo sa pasya ng mga magulang. Kaya't kahit na sa palagay ko, mayroong malalim na karapatan ang mga magulang patungkol sa kanilang mga anak (kagaya ng karapatan kung paano ito palalakihin ayon sa tingin nilang makabubuti para sa kanilang anak), hindi pa rin ganap ang karapatang ito. Nararapat lamang na lagyan ng hangganan ang karapatan at ang malayang pasya ng magulang sa punto kung saan hahantong na ito sa pagsasawalang-bahala ng pangangailangan ng anak.

## Uniberso ng Pangangailangan

Marahil may iilan ng aspeto ng kapakanan ng mga bata na lumilitaw sa aking paliwanag ng tatlong halimbawang nabanggit. Ganon din, kung tama ang aking pangangatwiran na hindi sapat ang multiberso ng katwiran upang punahin ang kawalan ng hustisya sa mga halimbawang ito, nararapat lamang na magbigay ng panibagong balangkas na makakapagbigay-liwanag kung paano malinaw matutukoy ang kawalan ng hustisya sa mga iyon. Dahil sa laro ng pagkabata, hindi maaaring tumalima sa ideya ng awtonomiya o katwiran para matukoy ang kanilang kawalan ng hustisya. Sa palagay ko, ang isang uniberso ng pangangailangan ang kailangang kilalanin upang matukoy kung ano ang kawalan ng hustisya sa aborsyon, diborsyo at surogasya. Anumang pagkilos na hindi ginagalang itong uniberso ng pangangailangan ay nagpapahiwatig ng kawalan ng hustisya.

Ang uniberso ng pangangailangan ay isang balangkas na naka-ayon sa pangkaraniwang pagkilala na mayroong mga natural na pangangailangan ang tao na kailangang mapunan ng kung sinuman ang may responsibilidad sa kanila. Tinawag ko ang balangkas na ito bilang uniberso, at hindi multiberso, ng pangangailangan upang bigyang kaisipan na may unibersal na mukha ang pangangailangan ng tao ayon mismo sa kanyang kalikasan at hindi nakabatay sa kung anumang ang takbo ng kanyang mga desisyon sa buhay. Bagama't hindi ko sinasabing ang pangangailangan ang pinakamatimbang na konseptong etikal sa anumang moral na tunggalian, ito rin

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<sup>56</sup> Tim Fowler, "The Problems of Liberal Neutrality in Upbringing," in *Res Publica*, 16 (2010).

naman ang tingin kong pinakamatimbang na dalumat kaugnay sa kung papaano natin dapat ituring ang mga batang walang muwang. Kaugnay nito, mayroong pundamental na tungkulin ang mga magulang na punan ang pangangailangan ng kanilang anak. Sa bawat pagkakataon na may isang batang napagkakaitan ng kanyang pangangailangan, mayroong malinaw na pananagutan rito ang kaniyang mga magulang. At maaari ring maipasa ang pananagutang ito, sa ibang tao kagaya ng ibang kapamilya o maging sa institusyon gaya ng estado, depende sa konteksto. Halimbawa na lamang, may malinaw na malaking pagkukulang ang isang gobyerno kung wala itong ginagawa upang sagipin ang buhay ng mga sanggol na iniwan lang ng kanilang magulang sa kung saan-saan.

Ngunit paano natin matutukoy kung ang isang bagay ay tunay ngang pangangailangan? Makakatulong sa atin rito ang depinisyon ibinigay ni Sarah Clark Miller ukol sa tinatawag niyang *absolute needs* na maaari nating isalin bilang ganap na pangangailangan: “ang isang bagay ay maituturing na ganap na pangangailangan kung kailangang mapunan ang bagay na ito upang hindi mapahamak, at maipagpatuloy ng tao ang kanyang pag-iral bilang tao.”<sup>57</sup> Walang duda na ang magpatuloy sa buhay ay isang pangangailangan, kaya nga’t itinuturing na mali ang mga pagkilos na nagdudulot sa kapahamakan ng buhay tao. Dito malinaw kung bakit ang aborsyon ay nagpapahiwatig ng kawalan ng katarungan: sapagkat ito ay nagtatanggal ng pangangailangan ng sanggol na mabuhay. May katulad na pangangatwiran rin pagdating sa pangangailangan ng bata na lumaki sa ilalim ng gabay at pagmamahal ng kanyang bayolohikal na magulang, kaya naman ayon sa balangkas na ito, ang mali sa diborsyo at surogasya ay nakaugat mismo sa kung papaano nakapipinsala ang mga bagay na ito sa pag-iral ng mga batang dinanas ang mga nasabing bagay. Sa madaling salita, nagpapahiwatig ng kawalang-katarungan ang deborsyo at surogasya sapagkat pareho silang nagsasawalang-bahala ng pangangailangan ng batang lumaki sa isang buong pamilya at sa pangangalaga ng kanyang mga tunay na magulang. Kung tagumpay nga ang aking pangangatwiran patungkol sa mga halimbawang nabanggit, lumalabas na napakaraming pagkakataon ng kawalang-katarungan ang dinanas at patuloy na dinanas ng mga batang walang muwang sa iba’t-ibang panig ng mundo.

Dahil sa malinaw na pagtukoy nito sa mga bagay na makakapagpapalago o makakapinsala sa pag-iral ng tao, ang uniberso ng pangangailangan ay isang balangkas na makapagbibigay anyo sa kung ano ang mabuti at nararapat. Halimbawa, nararapat lamang na punan ng

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<sup>57</sup> Sarah Clark Miller, *The Ethics of Need: Agency, Dignity, and Obligation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17–18. Salin ng may akda. Orihinal: “Absolute needs ... must be met in order for people to avoid harm and to continue to function as human agents.”

magulang ang ganap na pangangailangan ng kanilang anak. O di kaya, mabuti ang isang pagkilos na pinupunan ang ganap na pangangailangan ng kanyang kapwa. Ang mga pahayag na ito, bilang hango sa uniberso ng pangangailangan, ang magbibigay wakas sa pangangailangan ng diskurso. Sa usapin ng pangangailangan, lalo na ng mga batang walang muwang, hindi ang patuloy na diskurso ang dapat maging wakas kundi ang kolektibong pagkilos na matugunan ang mga ganap na pangangailangan.

Hindi rin naman ibig sabihin nito na wala ng lugar ang diskurso. Samakatuwid, ang uniberso ng pangangailangan, bilang balangkas sa pagpapatupad ng isang makatarungang lipunan, ay nangangailangan pa rin ng tahasang pagsusuri sa loob ng multiberso ng katwiran. Ang balangkas na ito ay nag-aanyaya pa rin ng iba't-ibang tanong upang lalo pang mapalinaw ito: liban sa mga nabanggit, anu-ano pa ang ibang ganap na pangangailangan? Kung ang pagkain at tirahan ay mga ganap na pangangailangan, sinu-sino ang may tungkulin na punan ito para sa mga taong nagkukulang rito? Ano ang relasyon ng pangangailangan sa karapatan? Ano ang dapat manaig kung may tunggalian sa pagitan ng iba't-ibang pangangailangan? Ano ang tungkulin ng estado upang punan ang mga ganap na pangangailangan ng bawat mamamayan? Hindi na sakop ng papel na ito na sagutin ang mga nasabing tanong. Ngunit kung sang-ayon ang lahat na kasapi ng multiberso ng katwiran na nararapat tugunan ang mga ganap na pangangailangan, magbibigay ito ng malinaw at pangkalahatang pundasyon kung papaano tayo hahantong sa isang makatarungang lipunan para sa lahat. Kaya naman bagaman hinugot ko ang uniberso ng pangangailangan mula sa abot-tanaw ng mga batang walang muwang, nais ko ring ilahad na ang balangkas na ito ay naaangkop sa lahat, maging bata man o nakatatanda.

## Konklusyon

Hindi madali (sa ilan ay imposible pa nga) ang makabuo ng isang ganap na makatarungang lipunan. At tiyak na may kahirapan din ang bumuo ng wastong balangkas na magsusuri kung ang isang lipunan ba ay makatarungan o hindi. Kaya naman, nararapat lang na ikalugod ang pagtatangka ni Rodriguez na maglahad ng isang pilosopikal na pagsusuri kung ano ang mukha ng isang makatarungang lipunan at paano ito maaaring marating. Napakahalaga ang pagbibigay ng tuon ni Rodriguez sa isang malayang diskurso upang maging daan patungo sa isang makatarungang lipunan. Sa pamamagitan nito, maipaparating ng bawat mamamayan ang kanilang hinaing o maging ang katangi-tanging pagtingin nila sa reyalidad at sa iba't-ibang sulok nito at kung papaano nararapat na kumilos rito ayon sa naituro ng kanilang kapalaran at sariling pagpapasya. Dahil nga hindi

pare-pareho ang kapalaran ng bawat tao, napakahalagang bigyan ng boses ang lahat, lalo na ang mga naisantabi at nabawian, sa pagbibigay-anyo kung ano nga ba ang nilalaman ng katarungan sa lipunan.

Sa papel na ito, nilayon kong tignan ang lugar ng mga batang walang muwang sa multiberso ng katwiran, at sinubukan kong ipakita na hindi ito sasapat sapagkat ang balangkas na ito ay nakatuon pa rin sa konsepto ng tao bilang nakatatanda at konsepto ng katarungan na nakatuon lang sa pasya at interes ng nakatatanda. Gayunpaman, gamit ang uniberso ng pangangailangan bilang balangkas, ipinakita ko rin kung papaanong ang balangkas na ito ay pwedeng magsilbing karagdagang elemento sa loob ng multiberso ng katwiran, at kung papaanong tinutugunan ng balangkas na ito ang pangunahing kapakanan ng mga bata. Kung ako ay nagtagumpay rito, may malawak na implikasyon ito sa mukha ng diskurso na nais ni Rodriguez sapagkat maaari itong magbigay ng karagdagang linaw sa iba pang buhay tao na nangangailangan ng kakatawan sa kapakanan nila. Sa bandang huli at anuman ang aming pagkakaiba, pareho naman kami ni Rodriguez ng ninanais: isang makatarungang lipunan na sumusubaybay at nangangalaga sa kapakanan ng lahat, lalo na ng mga naisantabi at binawian.

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# On Grammatology and Eurocentrism: Deconstructing the Philippine Nationalist Fantasy<sup>1</sup>

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*Michael Roland F. Hernandez*

**Abstract:** This paper works upon Jacques Derrida's institution of grammatology as an emancipatory project that inaugurates the most radical subversion of Euro-ethnocentrism. Taking grammatology as a hermeneutical key, the manifold forms of deconstructive performance can be seen as different, yet unique, sides of the same multifaceted coin directed at the emancipation of thinking from the limits imposed by that original, powerful, and all-pervasive Western logocentric metaphysics. Given this emancipatory spirit, this paper undertakes a selective exorcism of the nationalist fantasy within Derrida's oeuvre. Specifically, it examines his deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality vis-à-vis the anticolonial enterprise that theoretically resisted the Western colonial order. Here, I claim that deconstruction reveals modern nationalism as haunted by discursive complicity. I illustrate this thesis by presenting Filipinization, taken as the obsessive-compulsive construction of "who or what a Filipino identity is" and its attendant processes of social inclusion and exclusion, as exemplar of this contradictory neocolonial predicament. Using a genealogical critique to recognize such differential construction, I philosophically demonstrate the claim that Filipinization effectively translates the colonial epistemic violence of Eurocentric racism and its consequent "horror of absolutism" into the homo-hegemony of Filipino nationalisms.

**Keywords:** Derrida, colonial translation, discursive complicity  
Filipinization

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of an invited paper delivered during the "Asian Conference on Jacques Derrida: Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of His Death" with the theme: "Translations of the Other: War, Religion, Life-Death" held at the University of Tokyo on 28–29 September 2024.

*If I had invented my writing, I would have done so as an endless revolution.*<sup>2</sup>

## Forms of Deconstruction

In the Asian context—and more specifically within the Philippines—it is compelling to explore how Derridean deconstruction might be applied to interpret the diverse social and political realities of the region. Though it may be less prominent compared to more established traditions such as Scholasticism, Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy, and Critical Theory, deconstruction offers an alternative—yet promising—avenue for rethinking the familiar objects of philosophical and historical critique. The relative dearth of studies about Derrida and deconstruction in the Philippines may be attributed to the fact that there are no straightforward, clear-cut answers to how deconstruction can be made relevant or simply applied to the study of any subject. As Derrida himself has made clear, deconstruction is not a universal method that can be readily applied to any object of critique or analysis at will.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is a form of a patient, meticulous reading that is opened by a contradictory double gesture defined by contexts which are “never absolutely determinable” or, whose “determination(s) can never be entirely certain or saturated.”<sup>4</sup> Historically, Derrida even acknowledged that the word “deconstruction” never truly amounted to being “a good word [*un bon mot*]”<sup>5</sup> capable of encapsulating the discourse that he intended to convey particularly in his early writings.

Given the above insight, this paper advances a reading of deconstruction as a kind of homecoming—a performative re-turn to human dwelling that arises from an awareness of our urgent ethical responsibility to confront ongoing structures of historical domination and subjugation. Deconstruction, as I understand and propose here, invites us to inhabit thought differently: not as a means of arriving at fixed conclusions, but as a continual engagement with the conditions that shape meaning, identity, and justice. In advancing this, I highlight the fact about deconstruction as a non-monolithic approach to texts that can only be properly understood within specific contexts or moments of reading. It would thus be possible to speak

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview (with Jean Birnbaum)*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 31.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida has explicitly suggested that “deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one.” Neither is it a critique nor analysis in the traditional sense of the word as if proceeding from a certain domain of authority. See Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” in *Derrida and Differance*, ed. by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Coventry: Parousia Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” in *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” 5.

of “forms” of deconstruction or different “deconstructions” depending on the theo-philosopheme under consideration. Thus, deconstruction in an Asian or Philippine context will create more sense only if there is an appreciation of its multifaceted character.

Although originally stemming from attempts to translate Heideggerian notions of *Destruktion* and *Abbau*, the term “deconstruction” has transmogrified over time to denote a mode of reading that resists simple and direct methodological appropriation.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore not possible to speak of deconstruction as a singular method, simply because each instance or moment of deconstruction is unique and irrepeatable. For the perceptive reader, this implies that each deconstructive reading is a singular performance, revealing that there are indeed manifold forms of deconstructions, with each form being *irreducible* to the others.

I start with this idea of manifold forms of deconstruction because it allows us to conceive of the practice of reading as a performance that can illuminate the practice of translation. As a “performative writing,” deconstruction is itself the act of *doing* or *making* of gestures that “posit and transform the ‘concepts’” it analyzes or questions.<sup>7</sup> “Through these transformative performatives,” deconstruction is able to create *affects* or to constitute a non-neutral *affectivity*. Derrida explains that:

there is always a kind of physical engagement that makes it such that I am touched by what I speak of, touched as closely as possible to me, in my heart if you will, and so I try to touch the reader, whether him or her, in the same way. And these affective effects are part of the experience of deconstruction. There is no deconstruction without affect.<sup>8</sup>

Using this notion of performative writing into account, we can strategically understand the possibility of translation only as a deconstructive-performative transformation. Indeed, we can say that every moment of deconstruction is a form of translation, works as a translation, is

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<sup>6</sup> See Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Interview with Michal Ben-Naftali,” in *Oxford Literary Review*, 39 (2017), 155. Responding to Ben-Naftali, Derrida notes that “you’re right to recall that the deconstructive approach, at least as I try to practice it, is a thematic treatment, or the study of certain ‘objects’, certain ‘concepts’, certain philosophical problems in their historical genealogy. But this analysis that could be called theoretical and constative—it’s a question of analyzing the inheritance of ‘concepts’, of ‘values’ and ‘norms’—this consequently theoretical analysis of the constative type is accompanied, is of a kind with what you quite rightly called a ‘performative writing’.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

accomplished and performed as translation, and even provides a theory of translation. But translation here is not a simple matter of traversing a thought from one language to another. Rather, it becomes a performative act that involves the transformation of a discourse. In translation, the translator actively interprets the source text, making choices that inevitably alter its meaning, tone, and nuance. This process is performative because it creates a new text that is simultaneously the same as and different from the original. Because it is possible to find in another language a word which would say the same thing or “speak of deconstruction” and “lead elsewhere to its being written and transcribed, in a word which will also be more beautiful,”<sup>9</sup> a most beautiful insight from Derrida is given us: a translation acquires a status on the same level as the original. Such conception of writing, however, is what puts translation in a “double bind,”<sup>10</sup> where it must simultaneously preserve and transform the original, navigating the tensions between fidelity and creativity. Derrida explains:

In the limits to which it is possible, or at least appears possible, translation practices the difference between signified and the signified. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of transformation: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We will never, and in fact have never had, to do with some “transport” of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” 5.

<sup>10</sup> A “double bind” is an aporetic situation wherein a given thing or object of analysis is inescapably inscribed within the traditional discourse that it aims to criticize and surpass while transforming the discourse itself through the very same conceptual resources which it criticizes. This can be exemplified in the way Derrida has attempted to carry out the deconstruction of Western metaphysics. Gayatri Spivak explains that “double bind” is “Derrida’s newest nickname for the schizophrenia of the *‘sous rature.’* We must do a thing and its opposite, and indeed we desire to do both, and so on indefinitely. Deconstruction is a perpetually self-deconstructing movement that is inhabited by *différance*. No text is ever fully deconstructing or deconstructed.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” in *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), lxxviii.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 20.

Indeed, if deconstructive writing is performative-transformative, every moment of deconstruction is a translation because, as an open, meticulous, patient practice of reading, it involves the intimate act of de-structuration, dismantling and disruption of a text so that it can be reconfigured and re-inscribed in an ongoing, dynamic process of interpretation. Such action ensures that manifold meanings are continually generated through the interaction between the text and the reader.

Taking the above premises into account, my paper works upon Jacques Derrida's institution of grammatology (i.e., the science of writing) as an emancipatory project that inaugurates the most radical subversion of Euro-ethnocentrism. Taking grammatology as a hermeneutical key, the manifold forms of deconstructive performance can be seen as different, yet unique, sides of the same multifaceted coin directed at the emancipation of thinking from the limits imposed by that original, powerful, and all-pervasive Western logocentric metaphysics. Specifically, this paper undertakes a selective exorcism of the nationalist fantasy within Derrida's oeuvre by examining his deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality vis-à-vis the anti-colonial enterprise that theoretically resisted the order imposed by Western colonialism. Here, I claim that deconstruction reveals modern nationalism as haunted by discursive complicity. I illustrate this thesis by presenting Filipinization, taken as the obsessive-compulsive construction of "who or what a Filipino identity is" and its attendant processes of social inclusion and exclusion, as exemplar of this contradictory neocolonial predicament. Using a genealogical critique to recognize such differential construction, I philosophically demonstrate the claim that Filipinization effectively translates the colonial epistemic violence of Eurocentric racism and its consequent "horror of absolutism" into the homo-hegemony of Filipino nationalisms. To accomplish this, I proceed in three steps: 1) first, I show that grammatology is a science ultimately intent at the dismantling of Eurocentrism; 2) second, I highlight that an exorcism of the modern nationalist fantasy is a key moment within such dismantling; and 3) third, I reveal how discursive complicity precisely happens as the very translation of colonial oppression.

### **Grammatology and Eurocentrism**

In his "Exergue" to *Of Grammatology*, Derrida's sets the project of grammatology as a science of writing (*gramma* meaning "letter" or "writing" in Greek) ultimately directed towards a dismantling of the "most original and

powerful ethnocentrism," i.e., Eurocentrism.<sup>12</sup> He accomplishes this by challenging the traditional privileging of speech over writing (*phonocentrism*)—underpinned by a *logocentrism*, i.e., the metaphysics which has "always assigned the origin of truth in general to the *logos*."<sup>13</sup> This privileging, Derrida argues, represents an unjustified imposition of order by Western metaphysics and *epistémè*, effectively marginalizing non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge.

Grammatology, for Derrida, heralds a liberation from the pervasive limitations of logocentric metaphysics through the deconstruction of the concept of the "sign." Accordingly, writing is no longer the secondary representation of speech, but is, on the contrary, always already present at the play or movement of differences that constitutes and institutes the production of the signified (i.e., speech/*parole*) before the institution of any language (*langue*). Writing thus, is prior to speech and can no longer be considered as the mere "signifier of the signifier." Writing is "no longer indicating a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression, signification, constitution of meaning or thought, etc. ), no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier."<sup>14</sup> It "was never a simple 'supplement'" to speech, no longer mere "technics in the service of language."<sup>15</sup>

In this way, writing "exceeds and comprehends" language. It designates "not only the physical gestures of literal pictographic or ideographic inscription but also the totality of what makes it [signification] possible"<sup>16</sup> at all. Writing therefore is what gives rise to any "inscription in general"—whether literal or not, or, outside the order of the voice (*phone*). Theoretically, it is even what is constitutive of any *experience* or system of *meaning* in general. The advent of writing thus institutes and inscribes science (which has hitherto been identified and idealized as logic) and by implication, the whole "philosophical idea of the *epistémè*" and its attendant *istoria* determined "for the purpose of the reappropriation of presence."<sup>17</sup>

This liberation of writing from the clutches of the metaphysics of presence<sup>18</sup> marks the decisive moment when *epistémè* and *istoria* are freed

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<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> For Derrida, the term "metaphysics of presence" denotes "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for ... a [transcendental] signified" that underlies the whole tradition of western metaphysics." *Ibid.*, 49. This is the view that gives rise to *logocentrism*, i.e.,

from the system of presuppositions governed or ordered by the whole history of Western metaphysics. By protesting against the imperialism of the *Logos*, grammatology “must deconstruct everything that ties the concept and norms of scientificity to ontotheology, logocentrism, phonocentrism.”<sup>19</sup> This way, grammatology “inscribes and delimits science” by appealing to a system of non-phonetic writing that both *marks* and *loosens* the very limits of classical scientificity.<sup>20</sup> Operating between “an overturning deconstruction and a positively displacing, transgressive, deconstruction”<sup>21</sup> this moment of subversion establishes one trademark, among others, of what properly constitutes a deconstructive reading. In subverting the priority of the *phone*, grammatology has effectively dismantled the very language of universal Reason and the notion of scientificity that constitute the very pillars of Western culture. The subversion of Western metaphysics is thus, the deconstruction of that “White Mythology” that has always tied racial and linguistic superiority with European whiteness and “camouflaged [itself] as the [very] language of Reason.” Qua grammatology, Derrida ushers the indictment of Western metaphysics as the precarious ground for Eurocentrism and its inescapable justification for the violence of Western colonialism. He explains: “Metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest.”<sup>22</sup>

At this juncture, it is obvious that I take Derrida’s institution of grammatology as a model for ushering a critique of Eurocentrism and its inescapable Orientalism. This effectively aligns deconstruction as always already engaged with the ethico-political negation of colonialist ideology. This view, which risks constructing a grand narrative of deconstruction as a homogenous unity,<sup>23</sup> has been held by the scholar Robert Young. In his groundbreaking book *White Mythologies*,<sup>24</sup> Young explains that Derrida, being “anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of Western ethnocentrism from *Of*

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“the belief that the first and last things are the *Logos*, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and closer to our time, the self-presence of self-consciousness” (Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” lxviii), and *phonocentrism*, i.e., the view that speech or voice is prior to writing because of the “absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning ....” *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 231.

<sup>23</sup> See Michael Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).

*Grammatology's* very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice," had always "developed deconstruction as a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonization."<sup>25</sup>

### Exorcising the Nationalist Fantasy

Taking the project of subversion and emancipation explicit in the grammatological critique given above, I now turn to Derrida's deconstruction of nationalism and philosophical nationality to illustrate the inescapable Orientalism embedded within Filipino *ilustrado* nationalism. Here, I cautiously note that my analysis must only be taken as a representative critique of what deconstruction can aspire to when applied to the examination of the nationalist fantasy. By nationalist fantasy, I mean the fictive, often distorted, vision of the modern nation whose identity is traced to the myth of pure and sacrosanct origins away from the contamination of Western (viz., Spanish and American) colonialism. By concentrating my particular analysis on *Filipinization*, taken here as the specific discourse establishing "who or what constitutes a Filipino identity" and the attendant anti-colonial project by which a specific Filipino identity is historically constructed within the context of a nation-state formed by a *differential* complex of economic, socio-cultural and political factors, I show that Filipino nationalist fantasies commit the contradictory logic of discursive complicity with the inescapable violence of the colonialist ideology that they wish to combat. Utilizing the genealogy of nationalist ideology provided by the most illustrious representatives of the nationalist construction of Philippine history, viz., from Padre Jose Burgos to Jose Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados*, I instantiate this complicity by showing how the epistemic violence of racism and the absolutism of *Empire* were merely transmogrified into perfect tokens inscribed within the theatrical effigy of Eurocentrism.

As early as his work on *Of Grammatology*, Derrida admits that deconstruction "was already politically critical of nationalistic ideologies associated in principle ... with nationalism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, and so on."<sup>26</sup> By lumping these historical forces together, this clarification, given in response to Kojin Karatani's "Nationalism and *Ecriture*," reveals Derrida's eventual conflation of nationalism with ethnocentrism. Whether as an anti-colonial reaction against the West or in its early European incarnations directed at the removal of monarchic power, nationalisms suffer from a

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Young, "Deconstruction and the Postcolonial," in *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Royle (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 193.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida and Megan Becker-Leckrone, "Introduction to Kojin Karatani's 'Nationalism and *Ecriture*': Discussion Summary by Megan Becker-Leckrone," in *Surfaces*, 5 (1995).

discursive parasitism which reveal an ambivalence at the heart of its construction of the social and political field. As Becker-Leckrone summarizes: “Nation-states...are born not out of nothing, but rather out of empires and initially articulated within them—at once brought into being *against* the empire and potentially subsumed by it, included *within* it.”<sup>27</sup>

By the *technics* of language,<sup>28</sup> modern nationalism is inescapably contaminated by the very same discursive violence that has characterized Euro-ethnocentrism. In the context of Filipinization, this happens precisely at the moment when the articulation of the demand for social and political reforms against an oppressive Spanish colonial rule became based on the identity politics of a “Filipino people” which provided a very strict criteria for social inclusion and exclusion. Here, I turn to the pioneering work of Jose Rizal, the most illustrious of the Philippine nationalists to instantiate this Filipino nationalist construction of history.

For many scholars, Jose Rizal’s nationalism saw itself as a struggle for social and political reforms that is inescapably tied up to two notable events within Philippine history: the *criollismo* of Luis Rodriguez Varela at the outset of the long 19th century and the secularization controversy that ended the life of Padre Jose Burgos in the aftermath of the 1872 Cavite Mutiny. This developmental connection, held by the most eminent Jesuit social historian of Philippine history, Fr. John Schumacher, clarifies that nationalist thinking was, *initially*, not really intent at the separation of the *Islas Filipinas* from *Madre España*.<sup>29</sup> This can be clarified by considering the etymology of the term “Filipino” as it was utilized in this early nationalist discourse.

At the outset of the 19th century, the Filipino Creole Luis Rodríguez Varela (1768–1824) advocated for equal rights for Filipinos—a term hitherto used exclusively for Spaniards born in the Philippines—challenging the

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<sup>27</sup> Derrida and Becker-Leckrone, “Introduction to Kojin Karatani’s ‘Nationalism and Ecriture,’” 9.

<sup>28</sup> I understand *technics* as the assemblage of linguistic practices that produce discourses that effect specific social and political ends. For a deeper understanding of the connection between *technology* and *nationalism*, see Vicente Rafael, *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Mandaluyong: Anvil, 2006). Bernard Stiegler’s elaboration of the relation between *technics* and *being* is insightful in this regard. He defines *technics* as “the pursuit of life by means other than life.” See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus*, Vol. I, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>29</sup> Still unsurpassed, Fr. John Schumacher’s two excellent books, viz., *The Propaganda Movement 1880–1895* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1997) and *The Making of a Nation: Essays on Nineteenth Century Filipino Nationalism* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991), are studies that historically situate our theoretical problematic within the objective historiography of the Spanish colonial rule in the Philippines. This colonial period, traditionally conceived as spanning more than 333 years, is the only proper background within which we can set objectively the genealogical discourse on national identity and nationhood.

dominance of the *peninsulares*, or Spaniards born in Spain, who regarded themselves as the only true ruling class within Spanish colonial Filipinas. Varela's efforts for social and political reforms were interpreted by the nationalist historian Fr. Schumacher and the National Artist Nick Joaquin<sup>30</sup> as a type of proto-nationalism that sparked the formation of an early form of "Filipino" social consciousness and consequently, of a distinct "Filipino" identity. However, this *criollismo* of Varela and other early Spanish writers clearly revealed that Filipino identity was only limited to a select, elitist class. Their identity politics never intended to include the native lowland *indios* much less the various ethnic mountain groups within Spanish *Filipinas*. Rather, it only designated an extremely specific political identity for purposes of their own legal and economic advantages.

For the scholar Ruth de Llobet, this was a form of "political opportunism" wherein Varela and his fellow Hispanophiles exhibited their utmost loyalty to the Spanish Crown so that they can gain privileges that will make them at par with the Spanish *peninsulares*.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, we see at this precise historical period that Varela's *criollismo* was a process of defining a "social inside" against a differentiated "racial outside" composed of *peninsulares*, *indios naturales* and *mestizos*. Filipino identity, it seems, only applies to privileged creoles who are the only class worthy of being Spanish citizens too—a glaring manifestation that this *criollismo* was neither liberal nor revolutionary, if we mean by those terms a movement aimed at combating general social injustice brought about by colonialism.

Such parochial mindset became the progenitor of the succeeding discourse advanced by Padre Jose Burgos' proto-nationalism and by later nationalist writers like Wenceslao Retana and Nick Joaquin.<sup>32</sup> Here, Burgos regarded Varela as an exemplar of the "Filipino creole" and adopted his ideas as a ground for the secular Filipino clergy's own struggle to regain the parishes previously assigned to them by Governor Simon de Anda's policy of secularization. In doing so, he furthered the identity politics initiated by Varela, but with an important variation: he included the *mestizos* and upper-class *indios* within a multi-ethnic conception of Filipino identity. In the context of his conception of a secular "Filipino clergy," Burgos infused a stronger devotion to the Catholic faith into elements already established in Varela's early *criollismo*: 1) geographic affinity; 2) ability to speak Spanish and immersion in Hispanic culture; and 3) economic affluence leading to social prestige. Like Varela, Burgos grounded his notion of Filipino identity in the

<sup>30</sup> See Nick Joaquin, *Culture and History* (Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Ruth de Llobet, "Luis Rodríguez Varela: Literatura Panfletaria Criollista en los Albores del Liberalismo en Filipinas, 1790-1824," in *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, Año XLIV:88, Lima-Boston (2do semestre de 2018), 131-153 and 147. Translation supplied.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 133ff.

cultural fantasy of Hispanophilia which eschewed any idea of revolution or emancipation from Spanish tutelage. On the contrary, Burgos emphasized loyalty and submission to both Church and empire as ultimate markers why their reformist agenda must be viewed favorably. The “Filipino” is one truly hispanized and Christianized—such that away from the Spanish flag, the “Filipino” “will be nothing, and perhaps worse than nothing ....”<sup>33</sup>

Yet, while Burgos’ notion of “Filipinoness” has a more expanded “inside” than that of Varela, it still effectively differentiated itself against an “outside” composed of the poor and lower-class *indios* and those unchristianized populations within the *Islas Filipinas*. Like Varela’s identity politics, Burgos’ anti-friar rhetoric merely reproduced the epistemic violence of the racist ideology sustained by the Spanish Empire. Both were therefore united by a discursive complicity that neither challenged the violence of Empire nor strived against the oppression brought about the social, economic, and political order it imposed.

By articulating a Catholic Hispanophilia, Burgos merely perpetuated the ideological continuation of Spanish Imperialism through the glorification of a “Filipino subject-consciousness” divorced from any genuine vision of emancipation. In deferring to imperial power, both Varela and Burgos revealed their reformist discourse as impotent for articulating social justice for the downtrodden and most marginalized. They merely revealed Filipinization as an identity politics that merely articulated their desire to be elite, i.e., to be equal with the *peninsular* class and to enjoy their privileges. As in Varela’s elitist discourse, Burgos’s construction of Filipino identity clearly excluded the lower-class *indios* and other marginalized ethnic groups who cannot share in their “Filipinoness” (e.g., the Chinese and the savage, mountain tribes).

Such inescapable cognitive failure merely recreated the same structure of oppression that they purported to resist. In the years surrounding the events of the Cavite Munity of 1872 and the execution of the Gomburza, Burgos’ brand of identity politics would find itself reincarnated in the *ilustrado* nationalism by Jose Rizal and his fellow propagandists. As we shall see, Rizal’s pursuit of the same identity politics inescapably contaminated *ilustrado* nationalist discourse with the negative violence (effects or evils) of Spanish colonial power.

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<sup>33</sup> Jose Apolonio Burgos, “To the Nation,” trans. by John Schumacher, in *Philippine Studies*, 54:2 (2006), 168–209 and 196. This article is a translation of the original 1864 document “A la nación” that appeared in *La America*, VIII:17 (12 September 1864), 11–13.

## Translating Colonial Oppression

In Rizal's ilustrado nationalism, we see the full circling back of the epistemic violence of Spanish colonialism. If there is an undeniable intellectual legacy linking Burgos to Rizal, and from the *ilustrados* to the 1896 Philippine revolutionaries, then what we see in Rizal's understanding of Filipinoness was a repetition of the same obstinate Hispanophilia that both Varela and Burgos espoused. Like them, he conceived of a "social inside" that must be separated from an "excluded outside" based on stringent criteria of national belonging.

Following Burgos, Rizal displaced "Filipinoness" from its merely creole referent to encompass the natives—especially the wealthy and elite *principalia*—who can be united through a common legal and political representation. However, the *ilustrado* fixation on the cultural fantasy of Hispanophilia (language, education, wealth, and culture) as basis for their social inside prevented majority of the colonized natives from inclusion within the fiction of Filipinoness. This can be seen in the way the *ilustrados* looked down on the poor, the marginalized, and those who cannot achieve such exalted Hispanicity that it prompted Graciano Lopez Jaena to complain that Europeans are so thoughtless in their failure to realize that "Chinese, chinks, blacks and *Igorots* are not Filipinos."<sup>34</sup> Although Rizal and his cohorts would eventually renege on this blatant racism by claiming that those lowland Christianized natives (e.g., Bikolanos, Ilokanos, Bisaya, Pampanga, Tagalogs, etc.) are "filipinizable," they remained obstinate about the exclusion of the Muslims and the various mountain tribes like the *Agtas*, *Dumagats*, from their imagined nation. Simply, only those who can fit into the *ilustrado* brand of Filipinoness can be considered part of the "Filipino nation" and thus, be eligible for the possibility of being Spanish citizens too.

To justify the *ilustrado* restriction of legal and political equality only for a select few, Rizal had recourse to the racial science of his day to claim that the early ancestors of the "Filipinos" were already originally in possession of an "ancient nationality."<sup>35</sup> But the advent of the Spanish colonizers and imposition of their culture destroyed this golden age when ancient *Filipinos* "gradually lost their old traditions and memories, they forgot their writings,

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<sup>34</sup> Graciano Lopez Jaena, *Diskursos y Articulos Varios (Selected Speeches and Articles)* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1951), 171, cited in Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr., "Tracing Origins: Ilustrado Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves," in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64:3 (August 2005), 605–637.

<sup>35</sup> See Jose Rizal, "A Reply to Don Isabelo de los Reyes," in *La Solidaridad*, II:42 (31 October 1890), 505–507. Cesar Adib Majul speaks of "ancient nationality" instead of the word "civilization" in his short monograph about Rizal's work on Morga. See Cesar Adib Majul, *A Critique of Rizal's Concept of a Filipino Nation* (Diliman, Q.C.: Department of Philosophy, University of the Philippines, 1959), 10–12.

their songs, their poetry, their laws in order to learn rote by other doctrines, which they did not understand, other standards of morality, other tastes, different from those inspired by their race by their climate and by their own way of thinking.<sup>36</sup> Due this, these proud ancient ancestors, a once glorious race, were reduced into servile work, economic dependence and passive believing:<sup>37</sup> "... they were humbled, degraded before their own eyes, ashamed of what had been distinctively their own, in order to admire, to extol whatever was foreign and incomprehensible; their spirit was disheartened and they acquiesced."<sup>38</sup>

Just who these ancestors were, however, was a more difficult question to answer. Initially, Rizal asserted that not all races in the Philippines were equal in terms of culture and capacity for [European] civilization.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, he made a distinction between those "civilized Filipinos" [*los Filipinos civilizados*] and the "mountain tribes" [*los tribus montañesas*]. The former accepted conversion into Catholicism hence showing greater capacity for civilization, while the latter resisted, thus showing barbarity and cultural backwardness. He deliberately excluded the first wave inhabitants called Negritos or the *Aetas* whom he believed to be primitive and are incapable of, or "beyond the reach of civilization,"<sup>40</sup> and the second wave of invading Malays who eventually intermarried with the Negritos and settled into the mountains.

For Rizal and the other *ilustrados*, it was only the third wave of Malays who settled in the lowlands and who converted into Catholicism that can be considered as "real" Filipino ancestors. Belonging to the Malay race,<sup>41</sup> these "hispanized lowlanders" possess "a higher civilization and milder morals" as opposed to the ancestors of the mountain tribes. This third wave included the hispanized and Catholicized lowland populations of Luzon and the Visayas but excluding that of Mindanao.<sup>42</sup> To these groups belong the ancestors of the *Tagalogs*, *Bicolanos*, *Pampanguenos*, *Bisaya*, *Ilokanos*, *Cagayanos*, *Pangasinans* and other lowland Christianized groups, which were collectively

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<sup>36</sup> Jose Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," in *La Solidaridad*, 1:377–379 and 377 (30 September 1889). The concluding part is located in *La Solidaridad*, 2:31–39 (1 February 1890).

<sup>37</sup> See José Rizal, *Events in the Philippine Islands by Dr. Antonio de Morga* (Manila: National Historical Commission, 2011). Originally published as *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas por el Doctor Antonio de Morga* (Paris: Garnier, 1890), 40ff.

<sup>38</sup> Rizal, "The Philippines a Century Hence," 377.

<sup>39</sup> Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 612.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 613.

<sup>41</sup> Following Morga's assumption that the "people of Manila and its surroundings were not natives of the island of [Luzon] ... [but] Malayan natives ...." (Rizal, *Events*, 258–259; quoted in Aguilar, 618) Rizal would eventually claim that these ancestors were originally from the island of Sumatra [in modern Indonesia]. See *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 616–617.

called “*indios Filipinos*”<sup>43</sup> by the *ilustrados*. Eventually though, Rizal would transmogrify this collective into “pure” *indios*<sup>44</sup> whose meaning was “bounded and restricted.”<sup>45</sup> Constructed in a nationalist fashion, the word “*indio*” only applied to those docile natives who have opened themselves to Catholic conversion and Spanish civilization. This way, Rizal and the other *ilustrados* were able to limit the extension of the word “*indio*” to those lowland Catholicized “Malays” whose majority status gave them the exclusive right to be *filipinized* or to be called “Filipinos.” It is only to this last group that Rizal restricts the privilege of Filipinization as a process to determine those who can be included in the *ilustrado* imagination of what a modern Philippine nation is and thus also enjoy the full benefits of Spanish citizenship. This nativist exclusivism, which echoes the general *ilustrado* sentiment by Marcelo del Pilar, Graciano Lopez-Jaena and Antonio Luna, was so clearly adamant when he claimed that the “non-*indios*” or those savage tribes who cannot be filipinized only constitutes a small and insignificant portion of the peoples living in the Philippine colony.<sup>46</sup> These latter peoples cannot be accorded the “right to the name of Spaniard.”<sup>47</sup>

From the above, we can see that while Rizal grounded his identity discourse on Burgos, he also advanced it by relying on two elements: 1) first, the belonging to a “pure Malay Race”; and 2) openness of the same lowlanders to civilization, viz., Catholic conversion and Spanish colonization. In so doing, Rizal created the basis for a nativist racial exclusivism to determine who can be demographically included within the social and political *inside* of the then nascent Filipino nation. This exclusivism allowed Rizal to separate the “pure *indios*” from the non-Christian tribes who are uncivilizable and therefore cannot be filipinized. Simply put, only the *indios* (i.e., lowland Catholicized natives) can be made Filipinos. As Filomeno Aguilar Jr. succinctly summarizes it, the word

“Filipino” stood for the internally superior and dominant “race” led by an “enlightened class,” whose members, although charged as inferior by racist outsiders, were equal to Europeans in their being civilized and civilizable, deserving liberty and indeed their own independent nation.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>44</sup> See *Ibid.*, 626.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 619.

<sup>46</sup> See Rizal, *Events*, xvii.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. Note 121.

<sup>48</sup> Rizal, *Events*, 631.

In this vein, what we see in Rizal's nationalist discourse is a dialectical movement that traces the idea of *who or what a Filipino is* from its being 1) first, an appropriated social class of *naturales* (i.e., a native is defined as anyone born in the *Islas Filipinas* regardless of ethnic or racial stock totally disregarding its creole referent); to its 2) second, socio-political and legalistic meaning in the *ilustrado* construction of the Filipino as a "Spanish citizen" too; and ultimately, 3) to his mythological grounding of the concept of Filipino identity in the scientific concept of the Filipino race [*la raza filipina*]. It is this last reduction of the Filipino as a race, in which he argues for a pure and sacrosanct origin that essentially completes Rizal's theorization of what it means to be a Filipino. In Rizal's mind, the recourse to ethnological science would give the necessary rational ground for a secure ontology of Filipino identity whilst securing his privileged position as the chief architect of the then nascent nationalist movement.

How, then, should we assess the status of colonial emancipation from the perspective of Rizal's nationalist construction of history and discourse on Filipino national identity?

From the above, it has become clear that Rizal utilization of Burgos' proto nationalism as a ground for his own conception of Filipino nationalism and identity reveals that he also partook of the same biases and prejudices. Like Burgos, he also grounded his idea of Filipino identity on a Hispanophilia that effectively marked a *social inside* based on European racial superiority against an excluded *social outside*—considered as the "internal others" of the nation—comprised of the Moros and mountain tribes who cannot share in this racial unity. This appropriation of Eurocentrism was evident in the way he insisted on the myth of a "pure Malay race" as a basis for a purist nativist understanding of national belonging.

To solidify his argument, he accepted the biological premise that there are undeniable differences between human brains such that a hierarchy among the races is justified. This recourse to biologism constituted a striking paradox in Rizal's nationalist mythmaking. On one hand, Rizal's belief in equality among peoples was contradicted by his admission that the *indio's* "*poco capacidad*" (low capacity) or "*inteligencia limitada*" (limited intelligence) can be lifted so that they can somehow be included into the nationalist fantasy of Hispanophilia. Those non-Christian *indios* (internal others)<sup>49</sup> can also be civilized and thus, by nationalist inclusion, be part of their imagined modern Philippine nation. For the scholar Ramon Guillermo, this clearly means that

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<sup>49</sup> That is, those mountain tribes indigenous to the colony who share the geography of Spanish colonial *Filipinas* but are not considered part of the *ilustrado* imagined modern nation.

Rizal unwittingly accepted the legitimacy of the racial hierarchies which he was trying to dismantle.<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, Rizal's conception of the "Filipino" as a racial category grounded in the myth of a pre-Hispanic ancient civilization functioned as a privileged basis for asserting ilustrado superiority over "non-indio" populations—such as the Chinese, Moros, and the diverse communities later homogenized as *Lumads*—who were never intended to be incorporated into the imagined community of the modern Philippine nation. This coherent ilustrado elitism did not rupture the epistemic violence of the imperial project so much as it translated it into the racial logic of nationalist mythmaking. By positioning the modern Philippine nation as the sole legitimate heir to empire, Rizal and his fellow ilustrados reproduced imperial hierarchies under the guise of anti-colonial emancipation. Their nationalism thus emerges as a transmogrified continuation of imperial racist ideology and colonial domination—an obstinate racism that even led Rizal to reduce these excluded populations to mere quantitative insignificance.<sup>51</sup>

This double bind—advocating human dignity and equality while simultaneously seeking to reclaim colonial privilege as the new stewards of a Hispanized *Filipinas* transformed into a modern nation—constituted the precise translation of Spanish colonial oppression into ilustrado nationalist rhetoric. Philippine nationalist ideology, in modeling itself after the image of Spanish imperial power, inevitably carried with it the very specters it sought to exorcise.

## Conclusion

If there is any virtue in applying deconstruction to the analysis of modern Philippine nationalism and its history, it lies in Jacques Derrida's caution against the simplistic identification of nationalist struggles with genuine emancipation. The concepts of indigeneity and the people, often central to nationalist movements, remain entangled within the very Eurocentrism they seek to resist. Thus, nationalist emancipation, through its own autoimmune process, risks becoming another form of *enslavement*—ironically, one that may equally and paradoxically be called "liberation."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Ramon Guillermo, "The Problem of *Indio* Inferiority in Science: Rizal's Two Views," in *Philippine Studies*, 59 (December 2011), 483. Guillermo mentions that the letter is dated 4 July 1895 and is found in Jose Rizal, *The Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence*, Vol. 2 (National Historical Institute, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> Jose Rizal, *Cartas Entre Rizal y el Professor Fernando Blumentritt*, xvii, cited in Aguilar, "Tracing Origins," 622.

<sup>52</sup> Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 131.

His apparent indictment of nationalism, as Pheng Cheah<sup>53</sup> would have it, is not without ground. Derrida has always been consistent with his subversion of any system within the history of thought of which European colonialism and the anti-colonial movements it engendered are merely the exemplar binary. Inscribed within the inescapable economy of war, nationalism for Derrida has no future. Its institutionalization as an elite, bourgeois ideology prevents it from partaking of the “messianic structure” that obliges us to hesitate in the name of justice and a certain democracy to-come. It might be well to recall here, that the *messianic*, as differentiated from the *messianism* of religious institutions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is a universal structure within our experience that allows us to encounter the other, as “something that we could not anticipate, expect, fore-have, or fore-see, something that knocks our socks off, that brings us up short and takes our breath away.”<sup>54</sup> For Derrida, the technics of nationalism has not allowed us to think of the justice to-come “without killing the future in the name of old frontiers.” He cannot be any clearer about this sentiment in *Specters of Marx*:

Like those of the blood, nationalisms of native soil not only sow hatred, not only commit crimes, they have no future, they promise nothing even if, like stupidity or the unconscious, they hold fast to life.<sup>55</sup>

As we have seen, the deconstruction of nationalism and its history can only be opened up once we have gone beyond its signifying ethnocentric structure. This demands that we look for a new *technics* of freedom, of justice, and of a democracy to-come that must not be reduced to the limitations of a metaphysics of identity that is ultimately underlined by an obstinate ontotheological nationalism.<sup>56</sup> These limits, always already determined by a

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<sup>53</sup> Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> John Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 162.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 213.

<sup>56</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Ontotheology of National Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis),” in *Oxford Literary Review*, 4 (1992).

given natural language<sup>57</sup> and directed towards the teleological<sup>58</sup> achievement of a chosen people's destiny, must be continually disturbed by the "differential deployment of *tekhmē*, of techno-science or tele-technology" which

obliges us more than ever to think the virtualization of space and time, the possibility of virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us more than ever (more and otherwise than ever, for this is not absolutely and thoroughly new) from opposing presence to its representation, "real time" to "deferred time," effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.<sup>59</sup>

This new technics of freedom should allow us to think of any language (or all languages) as freed from the limitations of nationalist statecraft, i.e., as a bureaucratic apparatus emphasizing the primacy of the state as the principle for the "social monopoly of organized violence, notably in the form of the armies and police."<sup>60</sup> It is thus a technics that would allow languages to become "motherless,"<sup>61</sup> freeing them towards the potentialities

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<sup>57</sup> See Derrida's discussion of what counts as a "natural language" in contradistinction to what is formal and artificial. Within the context of Rene Descartes's decision to write in his native French as opposed to Latin, Derrida outlines the dilemma between what Descartes calls as the natural language, "native or national" and thus "particular and historical," as opposed to what "is in principle universal, ahistorical, pre- or metalinguistic" characteristic of "natural reason." See Jacques Derrida, "If There is Cause to Translate I: Philosophy in its National Language (Toward a "litterature en françois")" in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. by Jan Plug et. al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>58</sup> "A teleological history, as exemplified by Hegel, is a history with a future that is already apparent in its past. This programmatic history, a history that always knows where it is going, is not only chased by historical memory; it also facilitates a memory of the past that can reside in the present and anticipate the future. This kind of history serves historical memory as cohesive circle, giving it access to what has not yet happened but has happened before." Sean Gaston, *Derrida and the Challenge of History* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 227–228.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 212.

<sup>60</sup> Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassell, 1995), 116. Another description from Bookchin can make this idea clearer: "Statecraft consists of operations that engage the state: the exercise of its monopoly of violence, its control of the entire regulative apparatus of society in the form of legal and ordinance-making bodies, and its governance of society by means of professional legislators, armies, police forces, and bureaucracies." *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>61</sup> See Vicente Rafael, *Motherless Tongues: The Insurgency of Language amid Wars of Translation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2016). A "motherless tongue" would refer to the initial condition of impossibility of identifying an originary, primary language into which one may reduce an "identity" since our speech is always already contaminated by the

that linguistic natality provides. Taking cue from Derrida himself, this requires a deconstruction of language that reveals the im/possibility of the conditions for a purist tongue, or simply, of any monolingualism.

In a performative undoing of the very statement he wishes to affirm, thus, Derrida declares the impossibility of linguistic ownership by declaring two contradictory statements: 1) “Yes, I only have one language;”<sup>62</sup> “We ever only speak one language;”<sup>63</sup> and 2) “[Yet] it is not mine;”<sup>64</sup> “We never only speak one language.”<sup>65</sup> By claiming himself as a monolingual speaker born in Algeria yet with French as mother tongue (his first language being from the colonizer), Derrida doubts “whether we can ever call a language our ‘own’,” and whether an identity can really be grounded “in a geo-political home.”<sup>66</sup> Such impossibility reveals that every linguistic moment is always already inscribed within a plethora of inter- and intralingual translation that articulate the play of *différance* (i.e., the spatio-temporalizing movement) as the condition of any speaking/writing.<sup>67</sup> The possibility of bilinguality or of multiple mother tongues, and thus, of linguistic ownership, can therefore only be possible as an act of translation, a transformation that is opened up by the advent of the other, making it free from the ethnocentrism of nationalist discourse. Echoing Derrida, Vicente Rafael writes: “My language is thus one that is already of and from the other.”<sup>68</sup>

Within an anti-colonial framework, a new technics of freedom and justice would thus be one that translates linguistic responsibility beyond the limits of nationalist ethnocentrism. This responsibility must be, therefore, “non-religious, in the sense of a positive religion,” or “not mythological” or “not national—for beyond even the alliance with a chosen people, there is no nationality or nationalism that is not religious or mythological, let us say ‘mystical’ in the broad sense.”<sup>69</sup> This separation of language from the nation, state, nation-state, race, sex and gender, or what Derrida (commenting on Martin Heidegger’s work on Trakl) collectively terms as *Geschlecht*,<sup>70</sup> is what

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foreign/other. He writes: “Whatever I happen to be speaking at the moment is always commingled and contaminated with a whole train of other languages I grew up speaking and hearing in the past and to this very day.” *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other: Or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Syrotinski, *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> See Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Rafael, *Motherless Tongues*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> For a comprehensive understanding of the dictionary senses of this term, see the “Introduction” by David Farrell Krell in *Phantoms of the Other: Four Generations of Derrida’s Geschlecht* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).

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allows language to become emancipatory. A particular language is never the property of any given people or a nation because it is never self-contained but rather, always a product of *différance*—only able to come to its own through differentiation from all the others.

A new technics of language is one that allows us to be cosmopolitan, enabling us to embrace the world beyond our immediate borders. At the same time, it is also what allows us to be forgiving, hospitable, and welcoming to the advent of the Other. It fosters the capacity to return to a singular homecoming—where we welcome the Other in both peace and war, in life and in death—creating a space where what is “to-come” is met with openness and compassion.

This paper concludes by reflecting on the pharmacological potential of tele-technological advancements, particularly in the context of language learning. These technologies offer a remarkable opportunity to explore and acquire new languages through various mobile applications. The experience of learning a foreign language through a mobile app like Duolingo is both intriguing and insightful. While the process of language acquisition through a mobile app may appear trivial—spending only 3–5 minutes a day on basic phrases—one can come to recognize the profound freedom that modern technology provides in this endeavor. Despite the absence of a personal *sensei* (or teacher in Japanese), which makes achieving fluency a formidable challenge, the experience can nonetheless bridge the geographical and cultural distance between the student and the foreign (language and country). Through this technological medium, one can gain more than just linguistic knowledge. It has the potential to open a window into the “other” that is foreign, as a country or nation with deep historical ties to one’s own. This connection, facilitated by technology, gestures toward the possibility of *aimance*—a form of friendship that transcends the economy of violence, as Derrida might suggest. It is “an experience of friendship which eludes the distinction between active and passive,” where *aimance* becomes a middle voice,<sup>71</sup> embodying the mutuality and complexity of such a bond. In this sense, language learning through technology becomes more than a mere educational tool; it becomes a pathway to understanding, empathy, and a shared experience that defies traditional boundaries. The promise of this engagement is not just linguistic proficiency but a deeper, more intimate connection with the world beyond us.

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<sup>71</sup> Derrida writes: “that which lets itself be designated by ‘différance’ is neither simply active nor simply passive, but announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice, that it speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which lets itself be thought neither as a passion nor as an object of a subject upon an object . . . .” “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 9), cited in Alex Thompson, *Deconstruction and Democracy: Derrida’s Politics of Friendship* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 15.

Coming full circle, how, then, should we translate this form of friendship? Following a Derridean gesture, perhaps the most fitting translation is simple yet profound: “Come. Hello!”—an invitation that transcends formalities and welcomes the unknown Other. And perhaps, in another language, this could be rendered even more elegantly, if not more beautifully: “Konichiwa!”

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