

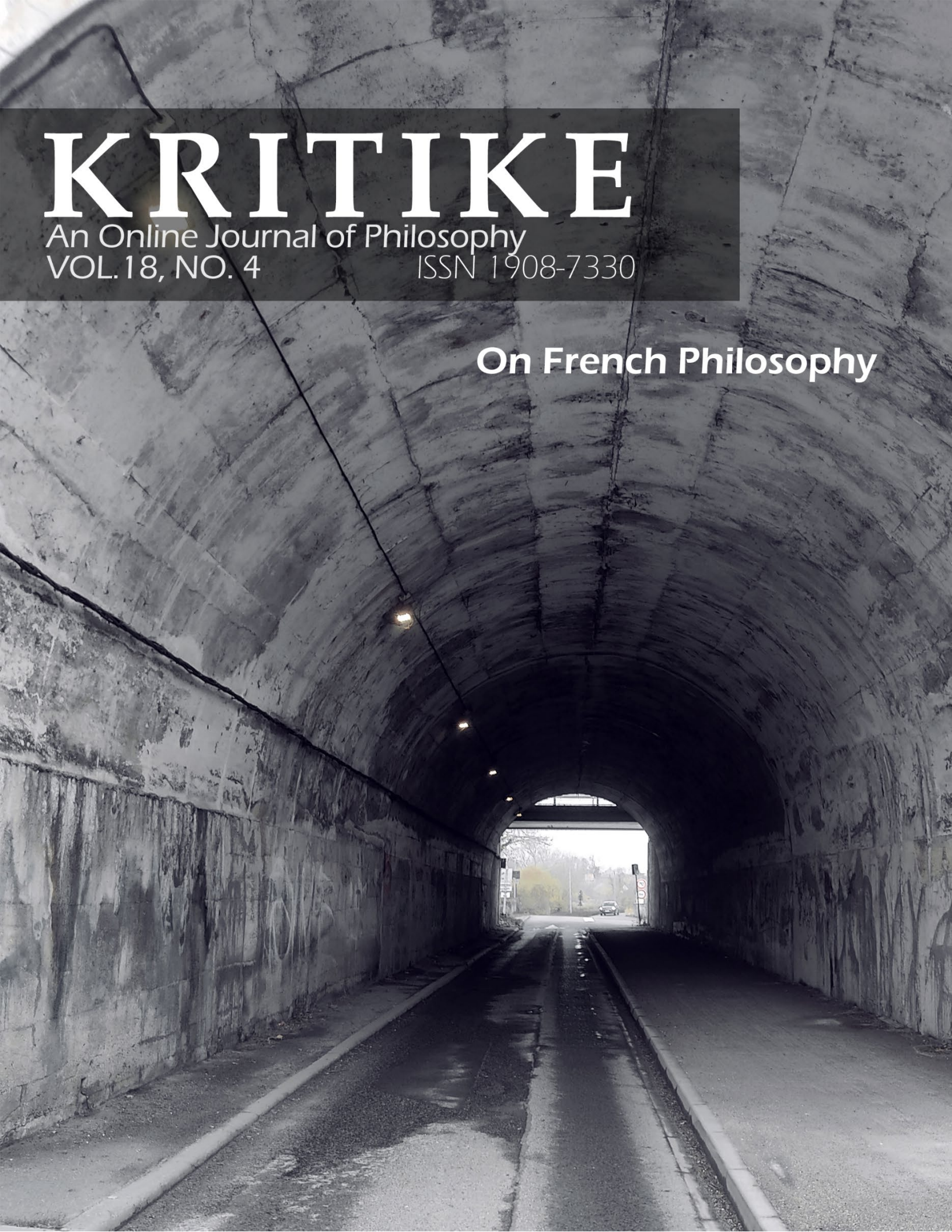
# KRITIKE

An Online Journal of Philosophy

VOL.18, NO. 4

ISSN 1908-7330

On French Philosophy



# K R I T I K E

An Online Journal of Philosophy

Volume 18, Number 4  
February 2025, Special Issue

ISSN 1908-7330

Special Issue Editors

Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños

Gian Carla D. Agbisit

Jessie Joshua Z. Lino

*University of Santo Tomas*



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

---

## COPYRIGHTS

---



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

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

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

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

---

## ABOUT THE COVER

---



This photo was taken in the commune of Camon in France in 2024. On one side of the tunnel are fields and parts of a forest and on the other side, the winding river of Somme.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. We are often promised to focus on the optimistic side of things, making the difficult or the uncomfortable as an unfortunate but necessary situation we have to power through. But it is the tunnel that gives significance to the otherwise ever-present light.

In this tunnel, we find writings, critical sentiments against a government that has abandoned its people, which, when expressed outside the tunnel lacks power, if not inaudible.

In the same manner, it is in discomfort, in being comfortable with the uncomfortable, that critique is most trenchant.

*KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy*  
18:4 (February 2025)

Photograph by Gian Carla D. Agbisit, 2024  
Layout and caption by Kritike Editorial Board

# About the Journal

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Editorial Board

---

### Editors-in-Chief

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

### Managing Editors

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

### Associate Editors

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

### Editorial Collaborative

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

### Style and Copy Editor

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

### Communications Officer

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

### International Advisory Board

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

# K R I T I K E

An Online Journal of Philosophy

Volume 18, Number 4

February 2025, Special Issue

Special Issue Editors

Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños

Gian Carla D. Agbisit

Jessie Joshua Z. Lino

*University of Santo Tomas*

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 MARELLA ADA MANCENIDO-BOLAÑOS, GIAN CARLA D. AGBISIT, and JESSIE JOSHUA Z. LINO

Introduction to the *Kritike* Special Issue on French Philosophy

## FEATURED ARTICLE

- 10 ALEX TAEK-GWANG LEE  
French Theory and Cybernetics

## PHILOSOPHICAL PRÉCIS

- 28 LEOVINO MA. GARCIA  
Ricœur's Ethical Philosophy: Becoming Oneself as Another

## ARTICLES

- 36 MARELLA ADA MANCENIDO-BOLAÑOS  
Writing as Praxis: Quito and Sartre on Literature as Philosophy
- 49 JOVITO V. CARIÑO  
Si Santo Tomas, Relihiyon, Pilosopiyang Franses: Ilang Leksyon para sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino

- 75 JOVE JIM AGUAS  
The Body and Marcel's Notion of Embodied Subjectivity
- 96 PAULA NICOLE C. EUGENIO  
Simone Weil on Living in an Afflicted World
- 109 ZHEA KATRINA R. ESTRADA  
Structural Violence in the Philippines and Freedom and Responsibility  
in Simone de Beauvoir's Moral Philosophy
- 128 PAOLO A. BOLAÑOS  
Figurations of French Critical Theory
- 137 RANIEL SM. REYES  
Chaosophy: Chaos, Chaosmosis, and Precarious Ethics
- 169 FLEURDELIZ ALTEZ-ALBELA  
What is Levinasian in Sustainability?: Sustainability in the Economy of Being  
through Levinas' *Le Tiers*

#### **BOOK REVIEWS**

- 188 FRANZ JOSEPH C. YOSHIY, II  
Roland Theuas D.S. Pada, *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida's Thought*
- 194 BRYAN PATRICK B. GARCIA  
Jacques Rancière, *Uncertain Times*
- 201 JESSIE JOSHUA Z. LINO  
Michel Serres, *Religion: Rereading What Is Bound Together*

## Introduction to the *Kritike* Special Issue on French Philosophy

---

**Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños,  
Gian Carla D. Agbisit,  
and Jessie Joshua Z. Lino**

### French Philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas

European continental philosophy has been a significant research thrust of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) since its formal establishment as a university-wide department in 2010. Various members of the department demonstrate a common interest in contemporary French philosophy, as evidenced in the content of their writings and teachings. While this common interest is enough proof that the French tradition is well-appreciated, it is, nevertheless, still worthwhile to showcase the fact that, among other philosophical traditions (Greek, German, Italian, Filipino) and in addition to Scholasticism and Thomism, French philosophy has had a profound influence on the development of the intellectual climate of the UST Department of Philosophy. This is enough reason to revisit how the French brand of philosophical discourse had been brought to the University of Santo Tomas by scholars who brought home fresh ideas from the Francophone world. Three notable scholars who have lasting influences on the philosophical landscape of UST come to mind: Emerita Quito, Alfredo Co, and Leovino Ma. Garcia. Quito, who studied at Université de Fribourg (Switzerland), was the first Filipino to author a dissertation on the French metaphysician Louis Lavelle, *La Notion de la Liberté Participée dans la Philosophie de Louis Lavelle*.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Co, who went to the Université de Paris III and IV (Sorbonne) and wrote a postdoctoral dissertation on Kong Zi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La Notion de Yi chez Kong Zi et la Conception de la Liberte chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Politique du Devoir*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Emerita Quito, *La Notion de la Liberté Participée dans la Philosophie de Louis Lavelle* (Fribourg: Studia Friburgensia, 1969).



## 2 INTRODUCTION

*et la Politique du Droit*.<sup>2</sup> Garcia, for his part, attended the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium) and wrote a dissertation on the philosophical anthropology Paul Ricoeur, *Between Responsibility and Hope: The Meaning of Man in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Social-Political Writings*.<sup>3</sup> Thomasians Quito and Co have had been very influential figures who shaped the philosophical culture in UST since the 1960s; while Garcia, despite the Ateneo de Manila University being his home institution, has been teaching in UST since the early 1980s and whose courses on Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion have been inspirational among young Thomasian students. Also in the late 1960s, the Dominican priest, Magin Borrajo, published *Moral Perspectives in Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism*<sup>4</sup> during a period when philosophical trends outside Scholasticism and the Salamantine Thomistic tradition were still regarded in disdain.

However, today, the Department of Philosophy can boast of a significant number of scholars who specialize and who are competent in French philosophy: Gian Carla Agbisit (Baudrillard and French contemporary aesthetics), Jove Jim Aguas (Marcel, French phenomenology and existentialism), Kriedge Chlaire Alba (Beauvoir), Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela (Levinas, French phenomenology and existentialism), Marc Aldous Baccay (Merleau-Ponty), Kyle Barte (Bourdieu and Mouffe), Paolo A. Bolaños (Deleuze and French post-Marxism), Jovito Cariño (Deleuze, French catholic philosophy and Thomism, such as, Maritain and Gilson), Co (Rousseau), Darlene Demandante (Lacan and Rancière), Zhea Katrina Estrada (Beauvoir), Paula Nicole Eugenio (Weil), Prince Airick Gapo (Rancière), Carl Hernandez (Camus), Jayson Jimenez (Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari), Allison Ladero (Mouffe), Jessie Joshua Lino (Althusser, Rancière, and Serres), Marella Mancenido-Bolaños (Beauvoir and Sartre), Peter Emmanuel Mara† (Bergson), Roland Theuas Pada (Derrida and French poststructuralism), Anton Heinrich Rennesland (Lefebvre and Foucault), Raniel Reyes (Deleuze and Guattari), and Michael Anthony Vasco (Derrida and Foucault).

Gary Gutting once argued that there might not be a singular theme among the different philosophical traditions which sprouted in France, “[but]

---

<sup>2</sup> See Alfredo Co, *La Notion de Yi chez Kong Zi et la Concepcion de la Liberte chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Politique du Devoir et la Politique du Droit*, in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*, Volume III (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See Leovino Ma. Garcia, *Between Responsibility and Hope: The Meaning of Man in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Social-Political Writings* (Louvain: Thèse de doctorat, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> See Magin Borrajo, *Moral Perspectives in Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1968).

it is hard to deny that French philosophers of the last hundred years have produced a remarkably broad and deep body of work on freedom.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, we find in the French philosophical tradition a deep fidelity to the idea of liberty. France, by the way, was the first country to emancipate herself from the *ancien régime* through a revolution. Such deep fidelity to liberty underlies the varying iterations of French philosophy: a concretely lived reality (Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus), the experience of one’s human fragility (Marcel, Levinas, and Ricœur), a distinctly natural force of life (Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze), or an illusion of the subject (Althusser, Foucault, and Rancière). According to Gutting, this commitment to the idea of freedom is informed by the notion that philosophy reflects “concrete experience” and, as such, “led to strong connections between philosophy and literature.”<sup>6</sup> This connection is palpable in the manner of writing of French philosophers whose texts exude a more fluid and poetic style. Many of them—like Bergson, Sartre, and Camus—are among France’s literary giants, all three were awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Both philosophy and literature share the same commitment to writing which paved the way for these disciplines to produce a consciousness or a style that is distinctly French. Perhaps, this might have been the same commitment we (as practitioners of philosophy in UST) share in our philosophical praxes. Following Co’s most important claim about the birthing of a philosophical consciousness:

Without a body of literary and philosophical writing, no culture could hold solid claim to a serious philosophy ... Great ideas are discoursed along the corridors of time, honed by great hermeneutics across ages, to give birth to a body of literature that forms the core of indigenous philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

A more detailed intellectual history of the influence of French philosophy on Filipino philosophy is yet to undertaken, let alone on the Thomasian philosophical landscape. Perhaps, it is too ambitious and too early to claim that Thomasian philosophy is a variant of French philosophy. What this special issue simply offers is an initiative to gather the sources we describe to be ‘interventions’<sup>8</sup> in the philosophical history of UST. Agreeing

---

<sup>5</sup> Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 380.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>7</sup> Alfredo Co, “Introduction” to *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection (1951-1959), Volume II* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022), xii.

<sup>8</sup> In *Being and Event*, Alain Badiou claims that an intervention is the proper name for an event, since it commits to the quasi-metaphysical nature definitive to events: interventions do

## 4 INTRODUCTION

with Co, we locate these interventions in the writings of *Filipinos doing French philosophy*.<sup>9</sup> These interventions reveal the deeply embedded seeds of French thought through contemporary philosophical *débuts* pioneered by Quito roughly around four decades ago.

### **On French and Francophone Philosophy: À L'éloge de L'Inconfort**

On 11 to 12 September 2023, the UST Department of Philosophy held its first Continental Philosophy Symposium focused on French philosophy with the theme, “À L'éloge de L'Inconfort” (“The Praise of Discomfort”). The aim of this initiative is to organize a series of symposia on continental philosophy in order to showcase the works of the members of the department on specialized themes. The event was also held to commemorate both the 80<sup>th</sup> publication anniversary of Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (*Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*)—a paradigmatic work that shaped the theoretical grandeur of contemporary French philosophy—and the 6<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Quito, recognizing her important contribution to the development of the philosophical landscape of UST.

The praise of discomfort in the practice of contemporary French philosophy is not new. In the academe, we are often told that one must safeguard this sensitivity to being habituated. What this meant until recently points to a criticism initially directed to oneself before attempting to engage in a “ruthless critique of all things.” This fetish for principled consistency is reinforced by what is warranted for a mature form of philosophical praxis: first, treating all others with equal respect; and second, trying to avoid offending the safety within the spaces [for discourse] allowed by institutions that safeguard them. As a result of being misguided from a confused relativism of this attitude, the fact that people today find criticisms of their views offensive became sufficient enough for the paralysis and pacification of critique. We are reminded here by the events of May '68 in France, specifically those value systems rigidly tied to the institutions and the establishment, as manifest proofs for the very problem at hand.

---

not enter within the immediate order of things. Thus, events *intervene* within the frame of order and causality, providing sense to what was considered without meaning at first in terms of priority. Badiou then extends his discussion in both politics and history, where interventions definitely involve a subjective process, “whereby a subject is created by getting hold of an event, a possibility of the situation that is present but not counted and accounted for by the dominating structures.” Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, xv.

Philosophical resistance, however, remained possible during May '68, specifically *outside*: outside the classrooms, outside the factories, outside the institutions, outside one's comfort zones. Sartre once claimed that praxis in all forms should express our dispositional commitments, seeing decisions explicitly in terms of loyalty or betrayal. A true philosophical criticism should go *outside* and outside of *itself*—the institutions that pacify criticism including those creative and productive ones. Critique should never betray itself of its forceful attempts to measure being over thought, to audit praxis from theory, and to welcome contradictions in the face of the real. Criticism is and should always-already be a restless gesture of being-beyond (*à la* Levinas), an opportunity to transcend the situation (*à la* Sartre). Criticism, in order to be constructive, has to be both destructive and deconstructive. Being restless, we are reminded with the words of Foucault (echoing Merleau-Ponty) when he claimed an important philosophical task: "never to consent to being completely comfortable with one's own presuppositions. Never let them fall peacefully asleep ...."<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the contemporary era seems largely defined by an overvalorization of positivity, convoluted enthusiasm, and a type of consensus blinded by disinforming affirmation. In this habitat, a critique informed by discomfort is perhaps the only proper orientation. While critique does not entirely dismiss the idea of comfort, what may have been lacking in us was a sufficient attention to its form: discomfort as a model of our comfort. Thus, the French *fidélité* does not simply mean a sustaining devotion to the status quo. We must learn that our commitments should require us some level of being separated from the status quo. It also signifies the refusal to accept the way things are, given the distortions seen when actual reality falls short in terms of form and prestige. Discomfort remains pivotal as a corrective refinement of a more genuine disposition for comfort, and to transform the manner in which we come to practice philosophy itself. Perhaps, we may learn from contemporary French philosophers that a critique tied to institutional and established bodies is doomed to remain complicit to the state of things, even at turbulent events of political and historical crises. We may also learn from them that one of the most profound ways of showing loyalty, respect, commitment and *fidélité* is to criticize and welcome the productive nature of discrimination, by not being afraid of giving offense virtuously in order to subject wrong arguments and disinformation to serious scrutiny—to remain always in discomfort. This, we presume, is an important insight and *leitmotif* to the practice of philosophy we must learn again from the French.

---

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (Volume III)*, ed. by J. D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 448.

## 6 INTRODUCTION

With the exception of Alex Taek-Gwang Lee's featured article and the three book reviews included at the end, all articles in this special issue were chosen from the French Philosophy symposium. While Lee's paper, "French Theory and Cybernetics," was not presented in the symposium, he, nevertheless, read it in a separate lecture organized by the UST Department of Philosophy on 26 August 2023. It is included in this issue as a featured piece that aptly opens the discussion on French philosophy. The article may be read as an alternative to the thematic direction of humanism, allowing us to think of the other sources of French philosophy. Lee's argument goes even further by claiming that the origins of French high theory during the 1960s should not be isolated from the contributions made by cybernetics and information theory to the social sciences—specifically how they were deeply embedded in Levi-Strauss' structuralist framework. While there is much appreciation to the historiographical efforts of Gutting, Cousset, and Descombes in narrating the developments of French thought in the last hundred years, Lee finds in Geoghegan an interesting historical take on the concept of code, and how data-driven methods of the Second World War shaped the post-war reconstruction of French philosophy, identifying structuralism as its premiere philosophical representative.

Leovino Ma. Garcia's philosophical précis, "Ricœur's Ethical Philosophy: Becoming Oneself as Another," was originally delivered as the keynote speech in the symposium. Here, Garcia offers a brief yet insightful elucidation of the "little ethics" of Paul Ricœur. He argues that an understanding of the three-fold relation of ethics, morality, and practical wisdom on the one hand, and the three-fold relation of the self, the near Other, and the Third, on the other hand, allows us to have a better understanding of Ricœur's capable human being. The essay ends with a call for each individual human being to lay claim on our capacity to give, which Garcia identifies as the only way we could survive *humanely*. Garcia's humanism, which he develops from reading Ricœur and Levinas, is reflective of the style and theme that is predominant in the writings of Filipinos doing French philosophy.

The article "Writing as Praxis: Quito and Sartre on Literature as Philosophy," by Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños, revisits Quito's *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre*. Mancenido-Bolaños takes inspiration from Quito's reading of Sartre, focusing on the inextricable relationship between philosophy and literature. Several writings of Sartre are explored in order to demonstrate this relationship and to argue that both philosophy and literature are committed to writing as praxis, that is, the writing of the material content of significant human experiences.

Meanwhile, Jovito Cariño's "Si Santo Tomas, Relihiyon, at Pilosopiyang Franses: Ilang Leksyon para sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino" is

another important contribution to the development of Filipino philosophical consciousness, primarily exploring what interventions may be learned from Aquinas and French Catholic philosophy. Written in Filipino, Cariño's work deals with the discomfort of having to question the place of Filipino philosophy, especially Filipino philosophy in UST. Cariño details Etienne Gilson's claim regarding the importance of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in French philosophy and how we can draw parallelisms between this debate and the question on Filipino philosophy.

The next article by Jove Jim Aguas, "The Body and Marcel's Notion of Embodied Subjectivity," offers a historical exposition of the idea of the body from different philosophical views, but with special emphasis on Gabriel Marcel's notion of the embodied subject. Aguas elucidates the uniqueness of Marcel's view on the body that goes against the idea that the body is only secondary to the mind. According to Aguas, Marcel stresses the importance of the body as an integral part of our identity, giving us the presence necessary for our participation in the world.

Paula Nicole Eugenio's "Simone Weil on Living in an Afflicted World" discusses Weil's take on the discomfiting predicament of affliction, and how attention serves to extend our existential concerns for the other. According to Eugenio, Weil's notion of attention, being "the rarest and purest form of generosity," does not simply distract us from our personal afflictions and preoccupations, it also brings our presence to a state of a moral awakening, voluntarily attending to the other in need through empathy. Through Weil, Eugenio hopes to challenge the myopic and blinding individualism of the modern world.

The article, "Structural Violence in the Philippines and Freedom and Responsibility in Simone de Beauvoir's Moral Philosophy," written by Zhea Katrina Estrada discusses Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy developed in her work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Estrada uses de Beauvoir in delineating freedom and responsibility as guiding concepts in understanding the political context of the Philippines under the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte. Providing a comprehensive report on the structural violence present in the Duterte Administration's war on drugs and the extrajudicial killings that happened, Estrada sought to locate in de Beauvoir a remedy to the prevailing systemic oppression: an ethical orientation directed towards a more responsible way of coexistence where we determine the conditions for the mutual realization of freedom.

In Paolo A. Bolaños' "Figurations of French Critical Theory," he traces the historical conditions and institutional factors that led to the development of the French tradition of critical theory, represented by intellectual figures from post-structuralists and from "postmodernist" thought (e.g., Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, etc.). Bolaños is convinced that the

## 8 INTRODUCTION

insights we gather from Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche provide the strong theoretical similarities between the German tradition of critical theory—represented by the Frankfurt School—and the French tradition of critical theory. Both traditions, according to Bolaños, share in common the normative assumptions originally formulated by Max Horkheimer.

Meanwhile, Raniel Reyes poses the question: How can one “befriend, and breathe within, chaos?” In “Chaosophy: Chaos, Chaosmosis, and Precarious Ethics,” Reyes makes use of Berardi’s precarious or apocalyptic ethics to give more depth and nuance to Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of chaos and chaosmosis. Furthermore, Reyes contends that Berardi’s ethics, informed by the creative and productive dimension of the Deleuzo-Guattarian chaos, helps in the discovery of new forms of engagement deemed proper if we are to survive the precarious situation of the contemporary era.

The last article in this special issue is written by Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela. “What is Levinasian in Sustainability? Sustainability in the Economy of Being through Levinas’ *Le Tiers*” provides an interesting Levinasian reading of the United Nation’s “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), through which we can re-think our idea of sustainability vis-a-vis the notion of individual responsibility as extended from the immediate Other in humans towards the nonhuman Other. Altez-Albela claims that while Levinas’ *Le Tiers* (literally, the Third) maintains asymmetry in ethical proximity, it could still accommodate the collective reciprocity of the good—such as when we uphold the importance of sustainability and participate with the UN’s implementation of the SDGs. As such, we indirectly become responsible for the call of the Other, and thus transcending beyond “otherwise than being.”

Included in this special issue are three books reviews: Franz Yoshiy II’s review of Roland Theuas Pada’s *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida’s Thought* (2023), Bryan Garcia’s review of Jacques Rancière’s *Uncertain Times* (2024), and Jessie Joshua Lino’s review of Michel Serres’ final work, *Religion: Rereading What is Bound Together* (2022).

We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the members of the editorial team of *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, who have been very supportive throughout the process of completing this project and for giving us the platform in presenting the interventions that follow. We also wish to thank the authors for their contributions to the cartography of French philosophy in the Thomasian philosophical psyche—*Merci beaucoup!*

We dedicate this special issue to a dear colleague and friend,

*En hommage respectueux à*

Peter Emmanuel A. Mara<sup>†</sup>

(13 July 1986–18 August 2023)

Department of Philosophy  
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines

## References

- Badiou, Alain, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2007).
- Borrajo, Magin, *Moral Perspectives in Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1968).
- Co, Alfredo, "Introduction" to *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection (1951-1959), Volume II* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2022).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *La Notion de Yi chez Kong Zi et la Conception de la Liberte chez Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Politique du Devoir et la Politique du Droit*, in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co*, Volume III (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2009).
- Foucault, Michel, "For an Ethic of Discomfort," in J. D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (Volume III)* (New York: The New Press, 2000).
- Garcia, Leovino Ma., *Between Responsibility and Hope: The Meaning of Man in Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of the Will and Social-Political Writings* (Louvain: Thèse de doctorat, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1981).
- Gutting, Gary, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Quito, Emerita, *La Notion de la Liberté Participée dans la Philosophie de Louis Lavelle* (Fribourg: Studia Friburgensia, 1969).



## French Theory and Cybernetics

---

*Alex Taek-Gwang Lee*

**Abstract:** This essay aims to reassess the historical significance of structuralism and contextualize its relevance within the emergence of French theory during the 1960s. The genesis of this French theory cannot solely be attributed to the continuum of French philosophical history; rather, it stems from an external catalyst that illuminated a latent theoretical blind spot. I posit that these external influences emanate from the realms of cybernetics and information theory. From this perspective, the essay explores Lévi-Strauss's engagement with cybernetics theory and its intersection with his structuralist framework. His theory of structure emerges from a discerning analysis of Shannon's and Weaver's communication theory, which accentuates the significance of redundancy—a fact that information theory tends to disregard as inconsequential. Upon this presupposition, the essay reconceptualizes the interrelation between structuralism and poststructuralism or postmodernism through the discussion of cybernetics and information theory.

**Keywords:** French theory, cybernetics, information theory, postmodernism

**W**hy is it necessary to revisit postmodernism and its relation to the rise of 'French theory,' which today sounds outdated, and can this twentieth-century term provide insights into the twenty-first century? The many misconceptions and prejudices arising from its overuse need to be addressed with an understanding of the historical conditions that created what is called postmodernism. In this essay, I will argue that postmodernism, as an intellectual and cultural movement rather than a specific concept, needs to be rethought as a symptom of the contradictions and limitations of the European Enlightenment.

Whether one defines postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, as a reiteration of modernism, or as a new epistemology that inevitably emerges under the conditions of the end of modernity, I believe that postmodernism can be defined as a reflection on European modernity that experienced the catastrophe of two world wars and the subsequent emergence of the US-led world system. The material foundations of this

European modernity were the nation-states and imperialism, and these fundamental problems are still the legacy that defines the world today. From this perspective, postmodernism is not something to be sealed away in a museum as a relic of a bygone era, but rather a problem of the past that persists in the present and needs to be revisited as a condition that defines us today.

Interestingly, the French philosophy of the 1960s, which is often cited as the origin of the excesses of postmodernism, does not actually use the term. While Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard draw direct parallels to postmodernism, their interpretations differ significantly from the widely accepted contemporary understanding of the concept. Behind this is a theory of anthropology stemming from Claude Lévi-Strauss, called structuralism. Of course, it is 'textbook common sense' to accept poststructuralism, which emerged as a critique of structuralism, as another name for postmodernism. However, poststructuralism, also translated as deconstruction and many notions, is only a convenient term, and the designation is not found in France, the birthplace of this intellectual movement.

In other words, whether poststructuralism or postmodernism, these terms were coined from outside the movement, not from within it. An alternative term would be French theory, which refers to a new current of thought or intellectual movement that emerged in the 1960s and reached its peak after the French May Revolution of 1968. This chronological development coincides with the French left's desire to revolutionize Marxism to address the problems of the French Communist Party (PCF), which were triggered by the Algerian War and the disillusionment of Stalinism, made self-evident by May 1968. In the process, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is positively received, and this curious interest ends with a critique of structuralism.

The term postmodernism would characterize this series of debates rather than the term Marxist innovation or post-Marxism. In other words, the intellectual and cultural fad categorized as postmodernism is the commodification of knowledge as French philosophy's theoretical response to Marxism encounters the era of global cognitive capitalism. As such, this process is far from unique. It is a pattern that has been repeated endlessly since imperialism when the "rest" of the world found themselves in the position of catching up with European modernity. At this point, the question of postmodernism, which is only faintly connected to the post-war French Marxist movements, is revitalized through the historical context of the Cold War and its aftermath.

As recent research has shown, postmodernism was not unconnected to structuralism and the Marshall Plan, and by extension, to the U.S. foreign policy for reorganizing capitalism through pragmatism and technocracy. The

## 12 FRENCH THEORY

financial support to realize the Marshall Plan came from the Rockefeller Foundation, and Lévi-Strauss's structuralism was a beneficiary of this funding.

Another reason for Lévi-Strauss's access to U.S. funding was his interaction with Roman Jakobson, whom he had met at the wartime Free University in New York City, where he had kept abreast of cybernetics and information theory, both of which were on the minds of American academics at the time. A recently published correspondence tells the story of this process. The origins of structuralism, as intertwined with cybernetics and information theory, are essential to understanding and contextualizing why a critique of structuralism emerged. To some point, certain French Marxists, the pioneers of today's French theory, embraced structuralism as a transformative extension of Marxism. Therefore, the challenge of French theory in the 1960s is still relevant today, when technological discourse based on cybernetics and information theory, including artificial intelligence, has become mainstream. To move beyond the current impasse of the return of the old to the new, we need to solve the tasks left by postmodernism again.

### Why French 'Theory'?

The naming of French philosophy as a 'theory' since the 1960s follows a tendency to recognize postmodernity as a concrete condition of reality. The most prominent theorist of this trend is Fredric Jameson, who wrote in a 2004 article that he believes "theory has replaced philosophy from the moment we realize that thought is linguistic and material and that concepts cannot exist independently of linguistic representation".<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, Jameson is critical of positions such as Alain Badiou's that advocate a "reinstatement of philosophy." For him, the end of philosophy is tied to the legitimacy of Marxism.

According to Jameson, three historical moments were marking the end of philosophy, or more precisely, European metaphysics, and the rise of theory. The first two moments were the rise of structuralism and the emergence of poststructuralism, and the third was the emergence of poststructuralism as "the most regressive academic discipline and the most tedious and tiresome form of philosophizing",<sup>2</sup> in which questions of politics are discussed primarily through rereading classical texts. Jameson's point is aimed at the "reification" of theories that have become mired in the swamp of liberalism. Interestingly, in opposition to this retro, hagiographical third

---

<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?," in *Critical Inquiry*, 30:2 (Winter 2004), 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

wave, Jameson foresees a fourth wave of theory, “the theorization of collective subjectivity”,<sup>3</sup> in keeping with his Marxist understanding that economics has replaced politics.

As Jameson’s discussion shows, it is hard to deny that there is a tension between the names ‘French theory’ and ‘French philosophy,’ which we often use interchangeably. There are various interpretations of this tension, including François Cusset’s cynical view of the terminology itself as an ‘American cultural product.’ In *French Theory*, Cusset sees the prevalence of French theory as a product of American academia, where “Lacanian - Derridean and Foucauldian-Deleuzian perspectives gradually began to occupy the intellectual field in many countries” because of the importation of French philosophy into the United States.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, Cusset believes that in France, the country of origin of French theory, the theoretical discussion of philosophers of interest in the United States has disappeared. According to him, the “theorists” who represented French theory in the public sphere “gradually shrank into obituaries and intellectual nostalgia, and their legacy became the monopoly of a few isolated heirs and the official rights holders of their publications”.<sup>5</sup>

It seems that his views have not changed much in recent years. In a 2022 article for an online media outlet, Cusset compares French theory to K-POP and reaffirms that “French theory is American.” By the word “American,” he means the political synecdoche in which a country represents the entire continent of the different countries or even the entire Northern Hemisphere. To summarize, Cusset’s diagnosis is that French theory is a product of America and that this American proper noun, like K-POP, has lost its uniqueness and is functioning as a global, common noun. While this is a compelling point on a phenomenological level, Cusset’s argument is highly problematic for the debate surrounding the acceptance of French theory.

As Cusset himself acknowledges, his diagnosis is partisan in that it relies on empirical impressions rather than concrete evidence or facts. In his analysis of the globalization of French theory, he overlooks the nuanced receptions of Derrida in India, Deleuze and Guattari in Japan, and Foucault in Brazil. Crucially problematic in Cusset’s argument is the omission of the fact that not all French philosophy has been appropriated as French theory. The fact that specific philosophical trends or movements of thought, the so-called “68 ideas,” have been categorized as French theory is a seemingly trivial but important point to examine. This included the iconic “global

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>4</sup> François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. by Jeff Fort with Josephine Berganza and Marlon Jones (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 309.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## 14 FRENCH THEORY

intellectuals” of Sartre and Beauvoir, who emerged from outside of French institutional philosophy. They refused to call themselves “philosophers,” and this anti-philosophical tendency was one of the important elements of French theory.

As Cousset also points out, the French intellectual current of the 1960s, so-called poststructuralism or postmodernism, was concerned with innovations in Marxism.<sup>6</sup> Cousset defines this as a distancing from classical Marxism, but historically speaking, the flourishing of French theory is closely linked to anti-Stalinism, the Cold War, and the subsequent *détente* phase. The “campus Marxists” that Cousset describes in his book—the “Marxist teachers” who dominated post-war French universities, reducing French theory to aesthetics, rhetoric, or, at best, the analysis of cultural symbols—were the mouthpieces of “official Marxism” represented by the PCF. In this context, the emergence of French theory is not unrelated to the post-war situation in France and the international context, which saw the rise of the Third World movement after the Algerian War. In conclusion, Cousset’s discussion suffers from the problem of simplifying the complex political terrain surrounding this French theory.

A perspective that diverges from Cousset’s discussion is that of studies that locate the development of French philosophy in the 1960s in France’s own philosophical genealogy. Vincent Descombes’s *Modern French Philosophy* and Gary Gutting’s *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* are two examples. Interestingly, Descombes’s book has a different title in the English translation than in the original French. The original title was *Le Même et l’autre Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française 1933–1978* (The Same and the Other: 45 Years of French Philosophy 1933–1978), and the two subjects, which abbreviate the history of 45 years of French philosophy, had to be replaced by the generic phrase “contemporary French philosophy” for a transatlantic audience. While this decontextualization was a condition of French theory, it should not be overlooked that within the current French philosophy, there were attempts to deconstruct the so-called philosophical tradition and challenge dogmatic knowledge.

Gilles Deleuze, who can be seen as representative of the philosophy of this period, quoted Marcel Proust, and defined theory as “a box of tools,” a much more philosophy-friendly position than Michel Foucault, who was skeptical of philosophy itself. Nevertheless, Deleuze’s statement can be largely seen as a departure from the traditional scope of philosophy as we know it.<sup>7</sup> Deleuze follows in the footsteps of Althusser, who, like Badiou,

---

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

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 208.

advocated for a distinct realm of philosophy that was both the same and different from that of philosophy and who sought to establish Marxist philosophy as a “general theory.” In this context, Deleuze’s language was intended to emphasize the practicality of theory. It resulted from his attempt to move beyond the humanistic Marxist or Western Marxist conception of theory and practice of the 1960s.

In *Modern French Philosophy*, Descombes provides a relatively faithful account of the problematization of postwar French philosophy, beginning with Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel and moving towards a deconstruction of the progressivist view of history. In this way, Descombes points out the interplay between the line struggle within the PCF and the formation of French philosophy in the 1960s. His pointing out the close connection between the formation of post-war French philosophy and the problems of decolonization or national liberation movements, including the Algerian War, helps us to understand the political motivations inherent in ‘French theory.’ Along the same lines as Descombes’s concerns, Johannes Angermüller’s book *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France* provides a historical overview of the genealogy of French philosophy in the 1960s.

Angermüller divides the formation of the French theory into three stages, starting with an academic conference held at Johns Hopkins University in the United States in October 1966.<sup>8</sup> Angermüller details the ways in which structuralism intervened in the tradition of French philosophy, with a particular emphasis on the confrontation between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss. Similar genealogies can be found in Alan Schrift’s *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* and Henry Somers-Hall’s *Judgement and Sense in Modern French Philosophy*.

Whereas Descombes’s book starts with Hegel, Schrift starts with Bergson and Nietzsche, and Somers-Hall starts with Kant to show the transformation of French philosophy in the 1960s. It is noteworthy that Somers-Hall’s recent book does not cover the topic of structuralism, a central theme in the other books. In the chapter on Derrida, the book does not use the term structuralism at all, except to briefly characterize Derrida’s discussion as “poststructuralism” and move on. This symptomatic remark may emphasize the uniqueness of “French philosophy” as distinct from “French theory.” Somers-Hall’s method of description, which leans towards a traditional view of the history of European philosophy, is in this sense quite regressive compared to Descombes’s and Angermüller’s, and paradoxically, it is possible to read in it the liberal arts materialization of French philosophy that Jameson points to.

---

<sup>8</sup> Johannes Angermüller, *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France: The Making of an Intellectual Generation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 16.

## 16 FRENCH THEORY

On the other hand, it is worth noting that, as recent studies have shown, other currents at the origin of French theory ‘invaded’ the French philosophical tradition from outside rather than within it. The emergence of this ‘particular’ theory, so to speak, was not limited to the internal traditions and circumstances of French philosophy but was made possible by a shock from outside philosophy: the strangers were cybernetics and information theory. Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan’s *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* is a notable intellectual history of this shock. In this book, Geoghegan points out that the foundations for theorizing society in today’s digital language were laid through three enclosures, or “laboratories”: colonies, sanatoriums, and camps.<sup>9</sup> Applying the data obtained from these so-called sample experiments to general social analyses was of interest in France after the Second World War. In this way, the concept of “code,” based on cybernetics and information theory, along with structuralism, played an essential role in the post-war reconstruction of French philosophy. Geoghegan describes this process as follows.

Structurally minded thinkers, among them anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss; literary critics Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva; psychoanalysts Lacan, Luce Irigaray, and Félix Guattari; and philosophers Jacques Derrida, Michel Serres, and Michel Foucault, applied the emerging intellectual tools to paradoxical ends. They wielded the new emphasis on theory and codes against the dogmas of humanism, and used it to valorize the kinds of analytical and textual operations long practiced in fields like criticism, psychoanalysis, and ethnography. As for the imperial thrust of - these emerging knowledge practices, and their association with U.S. hegemony, that too they put to a new purpose. In a country that identified modernization with imperial expansion, they flirted with visions of France as a new space of techno-rationalization, the human sciences practicing the kind of rational inventories nineteenth-century imperial ethnographers carried out in the colonies.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

The three types of laboratories mentioned by Geoghegan are not unrelated to the “colonial science” that developed alongside the development of imperialism. Along the same lines, George Steinmetz points out that “one of the distinctive features of colonial science, including social science, in contrast to traditional science, was its close connections to applied policymaking”.<sup>11</sup> In other words, French sociology and other academic disciplines were developed as a way to make colonial management more efficient, and “many colonial scientists moved back and forth between the roles of basic scientist, Cameralistic counselor, and government administrator”.<sup>12</sup> The relationship of French theory to these imperial laboratories and postwar academic systems needs to be examined in an intellectual-historical context. First and foremost, the fact that French theory is a “theory” has important implications. As Jameson emphasizes, we cannot ignore the context in which the decisive break between French philosophy and French theory occurred.

### Structuralism and Cybernetics

This fundamental break in what we might call the ‘turn of theory’ occurred with Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism. The history of French theory, or critical theory, is the history of structuralism. Structuralism was embraced as “a formalistic and objective way of thinking about the surface appearances that lie beneath conceptual patterns”.<sup>13</sup> The context for its adoption was the post-war U.S.-led geopolitics to rebuild capitalism, including the Marshall Plan. Ronald R. Kline identifies cybernetics and information theory as key theories in this Cold War plan for a new world order. This was, above all, the era of “Cold War science” and the global generalization of the concept of cybernetics, which had been introduced in wartime as a theory for air defense systems. Kline points out that “viewing cybernetics as a Cold War science was strong” and emphasizes that “the height of its media coverage, from late 1948 to early 1951, occurred during the fervor of the early Cold War”.<sup>14</sup> The CIA and the Rockefeller Foundation played a significant role in the rise of cybernetics and information theory in postwar America.

---

<sup>11</sup> George Steinmetz, *The Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought: French Sociology and the Overseas Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), 57.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Jacob Collins, *The Anthropological Turn: French Political Thought After 1968*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Kline, *The Cybernetics Moment, or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 83.



## 18 FRENCH THEORY

Although the Rockefeller Foundation was a private funding organization, it was an essential supporter of the Cold War system.<sup>15</sup> In 1950, amid the Cold War rhetoric of anti-communism and McCarthyism, John Marshall, the Rockefeller Foundation's director of support for the humanities, was the architect of the foundation's postwar support policies. Marshall's rationale, grounded in liberal internationalism, was "the welfare of mankind," but this abstract cause was all too well aligned with the national interests of the United States, which was then entering into a systemic rivalry with the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> It was in this rapidly reshaping postwar context that French intellectuals and scholars encountered cybernetics and information theory. Interestingly, this encounter was clearly accidental, but it was also foreseen. This accidental yet inevitable meeting takes place during the visit of the American mathematician Norbert Wiener to Paris in 1947. While in Paris to give a special lecture, Wiener met Enrique Freymann of the Hermann publishing house, who invited him to write and publish his lecture as a book.

While Wiener's role was undoubtedly significant, and there was post-war American financial support, it is difficult to see the relationship between French theory and cybernetics as a matter of one-sided reception. Interestingly, given that the first French translation of *Cybernetics* was published in 2014, it is unlikely that the cybernetics and information theories proposed by Wiener, which overhauled the post-war Anglo-American academic system, were accepted at face value by the established French academic community and facilitated the dissemination of the new theories. Rather, these contacts triggered a wide range of acceptance at the popular rather than academic level. A typical example was Dominique Dubarle's 1948 review in *Le Monde*.<sup>17</sup> Dubarle's introduction of the term "cybernetics" was not a new neologism for French readers. The nineteenth-century physicist André-Marie Ampère had already discussed cybernetics as the science of government.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of this acceptance, a French interpretation of the concept of cybernetics itself was added. The understanding of the term in the French context was more centered on the issue of "automation" and its limitations than the Anglo-American terminology of cybernetics, which was more orientated towards the monolithic explanations of "control" and "feedback." A vital issue in this discussion of automation was the claim that the precision of machine behavior is always subject to the interference of the

---

<sup>15</sup> Tim B. Mueller, "The Rockefeller Foundation, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the Cold War," in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15:3 (Summer 2013), 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Johnson, "French Cybernetics," in *French Studies*, 69:1 (2014), 62.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

“game” (*jeu*), and therefore, the process of control is limited.<sup>19</sup> At this point, it is not difficult to see a theme running through the development of postwar French theory that transcends the distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism. In *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious*, Lydia H. Liu writes that “what we now call French theory was already a translation of American theory before it landed in America to be reinvented as French Theory” and gives the example of how the different concepts of “game” and “play” became literary and critical terms under French influence.<sup>20</sup>

Although an oversimplification, Liu’s argument reveals that the particular movement of thought we vaguely refer to as ‘French theory’ or ‘post-war French philosophy’ was not a unique situation in France. In other words, the so-called French theory was not even French in the traditional sense but rather a product of internationalism or transnationalism, which sought to deconstruct what was French and create a new theory. It is worth recalling that post-war French philosophy may have turned to cybernetics and information theory as an alternative to overcome the “ontotheology” of European metaphysics that Heidegger’s critique of Hegel had proposed. As this topic deserves a separate discussion, I will focus only on the process of ‘convergence’ of cybernetics and French theory.

The common interest in cybernetics led to the term becoming a kind of silver bullet in postwar France.<sup>21</sup> The anthropologist Lévi-Strauss linked this widespread interest in cybernetics and its academic acceptance as a theory to explain society scientifically. In post-war America, cybernetics and information theory played a decisive role in establishing itself as a new social theory, with significant financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and the Josiah Messer Jr. Foundation. In this process, cybernetics and information theory were the source of sociological concepts such as encoding, decoding, information, feedback, entropy, and systems that are familiar to us today. In post-war America and France, cybernetics was interpreted by sociologists as a ‘general theory’ that could explain human behavior and social mechanisms, and the adoption of mathematical modeling as a methodology to capture these multiple layers of reality was a hallmark of the ‘human behavior studies’ that marked a significant turning point in post-war sociology. The study of human behavior, intensively supported by the Ford Foundation, fundamentally changed the foundations of modern disciplines such as

<sup>19</sup> Albert Ducrocq, *Découverte de la cybernétique* (Paris: Juillard, 1955), 38–39.

<sup>20</sup> Lydia H. Liu, *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 153.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “Textocracy, or the Cybernetic Logic of French Theory,” in *History of the Human Science*, 33:1 (2020), 56.

## 20 FRENCH THEORY

sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, and political science.<sup>22</sup> The notion of communication raised by cybernetics as a concept for explaining the relationship between individuals and groups was embraced as a revolutionary idea.

Similarly, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism was a theory that used cybernetics in the United States and other contexts to explain the transformation of complex and dynamic communities in terms of structure. The intersection of Lévi-Strauss and cybernetics was made possible through Roman Jakobson. As will be discussed in more detail later, Jakobson, a Russian exile, met Lévi-Strauss while working at *L'école libre des hautes études de New York*, the French government-in-exile educational institution established in New York during the war. Jakobson attended a conference of cybernetics researchers organized by Wiener under the auspices of the Macy Foundation and attempted to apply this mathematical theory to linguistics. One could argue that Jakobson's interest naturally led him to Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. However, Klein and Geoghegan add to this by pointing out that the origins of structuralism lie in the American idea of reorganizing the post-war world through pragmatism and technocratic bureaucracy. Behind this idea was the successful development of physics during the Second World War, which led to efforts to do the same in biology, economics, and psychology. Applying the methods of physics to other disciplines meant a greater emphasis on quantitative research methods and the introduction of mathematical theories of information.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, Wiener opposed treating cybernetics as a general theory and applying it to other studies because data collection in sociology is not based on closed circuits like cybernetics and lacks the observer's role. Of course, regardless of his wishes, the situation developed in the opposite direction. Despite his opposition to the application of cybernetics to social research, Wiener believed that even if the communication of social systems is more complex than that of machines, the grammar of the two is the same.<sup>24</sup> This sameness, or the totality of cybernetics, was the basis for Lévi-Strauss's formulation of structuralism. As Jean-Pierre Dupuy points out, what Lévi-Strauss's structuralism sought was "perception without a subject," "perception itself without a mind," and cybernetics was precisely the theory that served this purpose.<sup>25</sup> For Wiener, human psychology operates beyond the limits of logic and must ultimately be reduced to the central nervous system of cybernetics. For Lévi-Strauss, this mechanism of reduction was

---

<sup>22</sup> Kline, *The Cybernetics Moment*, 136.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *On the Origins of Cognitive Science: The Mechanisation of the Mind*, trans. by M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 19.

how psychology could be recognized. Lévi-Strauss defines “the structural studies are, in the social sciences, the indirect outcome of modern developments in mathematics which have given increasing importance to the qualitative point of view in contradistinction to the quantitative point of view of traditional mathematics”,<sup>26</sup> and he points to cybernetics and information theory as examples of the success of this modern mathematics. Clearly, this diagnosis represents a different perspective from Wiener’s skepticism about the applications of cybernetics and the assessment of cybernetics that was underway in the United States.

Lévi-Strauss was not unaware of these criticisms of the application of cybernetics to the social sciences; rather, he sought to combine anthropology and cybernetics to create an integrated science that would go beyond the limits of empirical science. Lévi-Strauss believed that the difficulties of anthropology in escaping empiricism could be solved by building language models. For this solution, perhaps even more influential on Lévi-Strauss’s conception of structure than Wiener was Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver’s *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, which defined communication as writing, speech, music, painting, theatre, ballet, and any process that moves the emotions of others. In the book, they argue:

The word *communication* will be used here in a very broad sense to include all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another. This, of course, involves not only written and oral speech, but also music, the pictorial arts, the theatre, the ballet, and in fact all human behavior. In some connections it may be desirable to use a still broader definition of communication, namely, one which would include the procedures by means of which one mechanism (say automatic equipment to track an airplane and to compute its probable future positions) affects another mechanism (say a guided missile chasing this airplane). The language of this memorandum will often appear to refer to the special, but still very broad and important, field of the communication of speech; but practically everything said applies equally well to music of any sort, and to still or moving pictures, as in television.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jakobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 283.

<sup>27</sup> Claude E. Shannon, and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), 3.

## 22 FRENCH THEORY

The definition that all cultural forms are communication was the decisive clue for Lévi-Strauss to establish language as the scientific foundation of cultural anthropology. While ethnography and social studies may not fulfill Weaver's demand for scientific measurement, Jakobson's linguistics serves as the conditions of a scientific object of study.<sup>28</sup> Through this dialectical syllogism, Lévi-Strauss reconstructs anthropology through linguistics and thus establishes structuralism. By examining the background of structuralism, which is closely linked to cybernetics, we can better understand the context of the structuralist-poststructuralist debate in French theory.

### Qualitative Mathematical Models

As mentioned earlier, the decisive moment in the birth of French theory was Lévi-Strauss's meeting with Jakobson in 1940. This meeting was not simply a meeting between an anthropologist and a linguist. Rather, it was a meeting that completely changed the landscape of thought in the post-World War II Cold War era. This shift was in line with U.S. post-war strategies, such as the Marshall Plan, which sought to expand pragmatism and technocracy against communism. It is significant here that the 'international fraternity' of scientists who assisted the Allies in their operations during World War II played a leading role.<sup>29</sup> Lévi-Strauss's and Jakobson's interest in cybernetics and information theory was fuelled by financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation supported anthropology and linguistics as a means of spreading scientific innovation on a global scale. Scientific innovation, as they envisioned it, was the rational elimination of partisan political forces that rejected objective, scientific analysis through expert-driven policymaking based on unbiased tools and methods. One of the many ways in which this "Great American Mission" was to be realized was the Marshall Plan, whose main objective was to defend Europe against Soviet influence.

In this context, Lévi-Strauss was somewhat of a paradox. When the Rockefeller Foundation chose to support him, U.S. intelligence identified him as a communist considering his work in South America, but the "structuralist anthropology" that Lévi-Strauss developed under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation laid the foundations for the French theory that Stalin

---

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Johnson, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Formative Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," in *Critical Inquiry*, 38:1 (Autumn 2011), 102.

later regarded as an internal danger. Interestingly, in his correspondence with Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss reveals that he was greatly inspired by Shannon's and Weaver's *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Lévi-Strauss writes that he "literally devoured the book" and emphasizes that it was their theorization of thought from a "machine point of view" or "object point of view" that was of most significant interest to him. Realizing that Shannon's and Weaver's mathematical theory allowed for a de-humanistic epistemological shift, he writes that he was "inspired to apply this methodology to mythical systems of thought".<sup>30</sup>

Lévi-Strauss saw in cybernetics and information theory, or more precisely, in mathematical models that promote algorithms of chance, the possibility of theorizing myths that cannot be understood in ordinary language. This idea was not so different from Wiener's. Wiener wanted to establish cybernetics as a general theory that could communicate between different scientific languages. The field of general theory is described by Wiener as "the most fruitful areas for the growth of the sciences were those which had been neglected as a no-man's land between the various established fields".<sup>31</sup> However, this inspiration did not mean that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism was a straightforward application of Shannon's and Weaver's mathematical model to the study of mythology. He challenged Shannon's and Weaver's notions of information and redundancy, arguing that the communication system of symbols works in the opposite way to their description. Shannon considers messages that can be calculated in terms of the amount of entropy as information, which is why unpredictable messages, or noise, are seen as containing more information. Weaver adds to Shannon's theory from the perspectives of discourse theory and semantics, defining that the redundancy of information transmission in different contexts, the repeated act of correcting an erroneous message, has an emotional impact on the receiver of the message and conveys meaning. They argue that a certain amount of redundancy can be treated as non-existent, provided that it does not exceed the efficiency of meaning conveyance.

One minus the relative entropy is called the *redundancy*. This is the fraction of the structure of the message which is determined not by the free choice of the sender, but rather by the accepted statistical rules governing the use of the symbols in question. It is sensibly called

---

<sup>30</sup> Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Correspondance 1942-1982*, (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 129.

<sup>31</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965), 4.

redundancy, for this fraction of the message is in fact redundant in something close to the ordinary sense; that is to say, this fraction of the message is unnecessary (and hence repetitive or redundant) in the sense that if it were missing the message would still be essentially complete, or at least could be completed.<sup>32</sup>

The upshot is that redundancy is not important to the message in the sense that the presence of redundancy does not hurt communication. Interestingly, Shannon and Weaver cite linguistic statistics to prove their hypothesis. They say that “the redundancy of English is just about 50 percent, so that about half of the letters or words we choose in writing or speaking are under our free choice, and about half (although we are not ordinarily aware of it) are really controlled by the statistical structure of the language”.<sup>33</sup> Lévi-Strauss disagrees with this idea and believes that the very point of redundancy or repetition is important in communication.

Lévi-Strauss’s thinking is well illustrated in “Human Mathematics.” In this article, first published in the UNESCO Newsletter, Lévi-Strauss emphasizes “human mathematics” as the counterpart of “qualitative mathematics” to Shannon’s and Weaver’s mathematical model. His argument is that while Shannon’s and Weaver’s mathematical model can serve an important function as a general theory that unites various disciplinary differences, it cannot capture social dynamics such as macroeconomics or population. Manipulation and simplification are inevitably involved in the quantitative reduction of qualitative issues, making it difficult to reproduce class relations that are composed of discrete values.

This mathematics of man—to be discovered along lines that neither mathematicians nor sociologists have as yet been able to determine exactly, and which is, no doubt, still to be elaborated a very large extent—will, in any event, be very different from the mathematics which the social sciences once sought to use in order to express their observations in precise terms. It is resolutely determined to break away from the hopelessness of the “great numbers”—the raft to which the social sciences, lost in an ocean of figures, have been helplessly clinging; its ultimate object is no longer to plot progressive and continuous movements in monotonous graphs. The

---

<sup>32</sup> Shannon and Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 13.

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

field with which it is concerned is not that of the infinitesimal variations revealed by the analysis of vast accumulations of data. The pictures it gives is, rather, that resulting from the study of small numbers and of the great changes brought about by the transition from one number to another.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, Lévi-Strauss sought to define structuralism by defining qualitative mathematics as distinct from quantitative mathematics. In short, structuralism was a theory that sought to explain society through qualitative mathematical models, using language as a scientific foundation. Of course, as we have seen, Jakobson had a decisive influence on the formation of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. The Russian linguist, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, introduced the enthusiastic young anthropologist to cybernetics and information theory. In 1949, at the end of World War II, Jakobson embraced elements of cybernetics and information theory and succeeded in securing funding for his research from the Rockefeller Foundation. For Jakobson, cybernetics and information theory were the future of human science. In 1948, Jakobson could attend the Macy Conference on cybernetics as a guest. Jakobson's participation in the conference was prompted by a call from founding members Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead that sociologists should be actively invited to address the disconnect between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

After attending the conference, Jakobson asked Weaver of the Rockefeller Foundation to send books on cybernetics and information theory to Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan in Paris. Jakobson's help made possible Lacan's writings and seminars on cybernetics. Lévi-Strauss interpreted Marcel Mauss's theory to conceptualize primitive gift-giving and receiving practices as corresponding to cybernetic communication systems. This interpretation is the product of a perspective that integrates linguistic, economic, social, and technological systems of communication. The adoption of this perspective explains why there is no essential distinction between technical and linguistic communication in the discussions of French theorists such as Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze, and Guattari.

Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is, therefore, not a relic of a bygone era that poststructuralism or postmodernism has overcome. On the contrary, the challenges posed by structuralism are still with us. Structuralism sought to uncover the underlying principles of how symbolic systems work by examining how they are organized and interconnected. This effort involved

---

<sup>34</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Human Mathematics," in *The UNESCO Courier*, 5 (2008), 22–23.



classifying the elements of a system, understanding their relationships, and identifying patterns as the initial steps to understanding. Poststructuralism paradoxically uses structuralist methods to deconstruct the implicit logic that constitutes structuralism. Whether or not poststructuralism is a fundamental break with structuralism is a matter of debate, but what is clear is that without structuralism, there would be no poststructuralism. Poststructuralism was a theoretical trend that sought to rethink cybernetics and information theory, especially the problem of the mathematization of knowledge questioned by Lévi-Strauss. Poststructuralism is a theory that pushes the point of what Lévi-Strauss called “human mathematics” further.

Indeed, the appropriation of French theories of cybernetics, which was active in the 1960s, is still relevant today, given that the rise of artificial intelligence and automation is reopening the issues that structuralism faced in the past. As an aesthetic form, so-called postmodernism is nothing more than the practice of the incommensurability of this French theory of cybernetics. When Jameson named postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, he may have had in mind the rise of ‘digital capitalism,’ the combination of cybernetics theory and capitalism that French theory—structuralism and poststructuralism—sought to problematize. In particular, the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, the development of the big data industry, and the rapid upgrading of computer technology have made it possible to look at many of the problems that were once considered intractable in cybernetics and information theory from a new angle. Whether the emergence of these new conditions represents a leap forward in technology beyond the limits of cybernetics and information theory that structuralism and postmodernism challenged or a return to the old future will require further discussion.

*Centre for Technology in Humanities  
Kyung Hee University, South Korea*

## References

- Angermuller, Johannes, *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France: The Making of an Intellectual Generation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
- Collins, Jacob, *The Anthropological Turn: French Political Thought After 1968*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).
- Cousset, François, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. by Jeff Fort with Josephine Berganza and Marlon Jones (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
- Ducrocq, Albert, *Découverte de la cybernétique* (Paris: Juillard, 1955).

- Dupuy, Jean-Pierre, *On the Origins of Cognitive Science: The Mechanisation of the Mind*, trans. M. B. DeBeviore (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009).
- Foucault, Michel, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).
- Geoghegan, Bernard Dionysius, *Code: From Information Theory to French Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," in *Critical Inquiry*, 38:1 (Autumn 2011), 96–126.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Textocracy, or the Cybernetic Logic of French Theory," in *History of the Human Science*, 33:1 (2020), 52–79.
- Jakobson, Roman and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Correspondance 1942-1982*, (Paris: Seuil, 2018).
- Jameson, Fredric, "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?," in *Critical Inquiry*, 30:2 (Winter 2004), 403–408.
- Johnson Christopher, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Formative Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "French Cybernetics," in *French Studies*, 69:1 (2014), 60–78.
- Kline, Ronald R., *The Cybernetics Moment, or Why We Call Our Age the Information Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, "Human Mathematics," *The UNESCO Courier*, 5 (2008), 21–24.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jakobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963).
- Liu, Lydia H., *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).
- Mueller, Tim B., "The Rockefeller Foundation, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities in the Cold War," in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 15:3 (Summer 2013), 108–135.
- Shannon, Claude E., and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).
- Steinmetz, George, *The Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought: French Sociology and the Overseas Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).
- Wiener, Norbert, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965).

Philosophical Précis

## Ricœur's Ethical Philosophy: Becoming Oneself as Another

---

*Leovino Ma. Garcia*

**Abstract:** This philosophical précis elucidates on key concepts surrounding Paul Ricoeur's "little ethics." The notes focus on the relationship between ethics, morality, and practical wisdom, on the one hand, and the self, the near Other, and the Third, on the other hand. These are the concepts that will allow us to understand Ricoeur's notion of the "capable human being."

**Keywords:** Ricoeur, capable human being, ethics, morality

### Philosophy as a "living struggle with texts"

I borrow the expression "loving struggle" from Paul Ricoeur's "*combat amoureux*" who borrowed it in turn from Karl Jaspers's "*liebende Kampf*."<sup>1</sup> When one struggles with a creative philosopher like Ricoeur, one becomes changed. In wrestling with a philosopher, one walks away with a philosophical limp. In creatively repeating what a philosopher says, one also becomes aware that she or he adds a different accent or flavor. It changes the taste, which is interesting because our word for experience, *karanasan* comes from the Sanskrit *rasa, lasa*, which also means taste. In Western or better still non-Asian philosophies, the stress is on the sense of sight; in Asian philosophy, the stress is on the sense of taste.

### Ricoeur's "little ethics"

In 1986, Ricoeur delivered the Gifford lectures at the University of Edinburgh. These lectures explored the theme of the "Capable Human Being." A capable human being can speak, act, and narrate. These capacities formed the bases for the first six studies he wrote.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hitler of course wrote a book "Mein Kampf" ("My Struggle") but that was a totally different struggle, not a "loving struggle."

But a person can also be responsible, make promises, remember and sometimes forget. These capabilities were not dealt with in the Gifford Lectures. From 1986 to 1990, Ricœur wrote three studies on them which he added to the six studies when he published *Soi-même comme un autre*<sup>2</sup> in 1990 (translated into English as *Oneself as Another*<sup>3</sup> in 1992). Ricœur ironically called the three studies his *little ethics* (*petite éthique, minima moralia*).<sup>4</sup> But it is this little ethics that constitutes Ricœur's major contribution to the field of ethics and politics.

Ricœur brings out "a new dimension" between ethics and morality, "often taken to be synonymous," but according to Ricœur "subject to the distinction" he is proposing which must not only be justified on the personal level but also on the institutional level, more specifically at the level of political institutions.<sup>5</sup>

The English word, *ethics* comes indeed from the Greek word *ethos* and the English word *morality* from the Latin word *mores* which in turn is the root of the words "moral" and "morals." Both words mean "customs," "manners." In Filipino, it is also *étika* (from the Spanish word *ética*) defined as "*pag-aaral tungkol sa mga moral na pagkilos, asal, at gawain ng tao*" (a study that deals with the moral actions and behavior of humans).<sup>6</sup> Notice how the *etikal* becomes synonymous with the word *moral*.

Ricœur, however, stresses that there is a very important distinction between the two terms. He defines ethics as "aiming for the 'good life,' with and for others, in just institutions."<sup>7</sup>

Following Ricœur, I propose to discuss the problem on two levels which intersect; the two axes: vertical & horizontal.

### **Vertical Axis: ethics, morality, practical wisdom**

On a first level, the deepest and broadest level, ethics aims at the good life, a true fulfilled life, wherein one experiences happiness, meaning. This is

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> This "little ethics" is also found in the seventh chapter to the ninth chapter of *Soi-même comme un autre*.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricœur, "The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political," in Greg S. Johnson and Dan R. Stiver eds., *Paul Ricœur: The Task of Political Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 13. Ricœur's French text was published in 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Virgilio S. Almario ed., *UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* (Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 172.

### 30 RICŒUR'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

more understandable when one goes to the French word for it: *sens*, which means direction, as in *sens unique* means “one way”).<sup>8</sup>

Ethics is optative—something one opts for, prefers, chooses, and decides to do. It is also from here that we veer away from the view about ethics being linked with natural inclination since choices are definitive proofs of our human deliberation.

On a second middle level, the more limited term “moral” has to do with the norm, law, duty, obligation, prohibition, what is permitted or forbidden. The law introduces aspects of universality and obligation. Whereas ethics is optative, morality is imperative. Ricœur tells us not to shut ourselves in the moral.

On a third level is the level of practical wisdom which the Ancients called *phronesis* in Greek and *prudentia* in Latin. However, today, the English word “prudence” has become synonymous with hesitation, caution. On the contrary, *phronesis* has to do with the “courage to be”—the courage to face new, unique situations, demanding a concrete decision.<sup>9</sup>

Ricœur tells us that it is “by convention” that he reserves “ethics” for the aim of an accomplished life and the term “morality” for the articulation of this aim in norms “characterized at once by the claim to universality and by an effect of constraint (or obligation).”<sup>10</sup>

He also points out that it is easy to recognize in the distinction between aim and norm:

The opposition between two heritages—an Aristotelian heritage, where ethics is characterized by its teleological (telos/aim) perspective, and a Kantian heritage, where morality is defined by a categorical imperative that leads to the notion of duty—lies at the heart of the philosophical debate concerning the foundations of ethics.<sup>11</sup>

Without concerning himself whether he is following Aristotle or Kant, but still paying close attention to their founding texts, Ricœur then wagers a creative interplay between Aristotle and Kant. This wager results in Ricœur’s major contribution to ethics—a creative interplay between ethics, morality, and practical wisdom.

---

<sup>8</sup> Editors’ note: *Sens* in French also pertains to sense, as in the five senses. It can also refer to common sense (*sens commun*) or the capacity to judge correctly without involving the passions (as in *bon sens*), or the ability to know (as in *avoir le sens des nuances*).

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952).

<sup>10</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

On page 180 of *Oneself as Another*, the ethical perspective is defined as “aiming at the good life/ with and for others/ in just institutions.”

Ricœur then envisions an ethical philosophy stressing three important aspects in his ethics: 1) the primacy of ethics over morality, 2) the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the sieve of the moral norm, and 3) the legitimacy of return by the norm to the ethical aim whenever the norm leads to practical difficulties.<sup>12</sup>

In Ricœur’s view, morality constitutes “only a limited, although legitimate and even indispensable, actualization of the ethical aim, and ethics would then encompass morality.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is important to note that Ricœur’s wager seeks a creative interplay between Aristotle and Kant. There will be no attempt to substitute Kant for Aristotle. Instead, between the two traditions, he shall establish “a relation at once of subordination and complementarity which the final recourse of morality to ethics will ultimately come to reinforce.”<sup>14</sup>

One then has to distinguish three “moments” in ethics: 1) the ethical aim of what one esteems as good, more Aristotelian and teleological, 2) the moral norm of what imposes itself as obligation, more Kantian and deontological, and the properly Ricœurian contribution of practical wisdom.

### **Horizontal axis: self, the near Other, *le tiers***

Why stress the important distinction between ethics and morality?

There are historical bases for it. Aristotle wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Baruch Spinoza wrote a work entitled *Ethica*. Morality is more stressed by Immanuel Kant as evident in his vocabulary: norm, command, duty, obligation, prohibition.

This triadic definition that involves ethics, morality and practical wisdom “unites the self in its original capacity of esteem to the Other, made

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 170. At the beginning of his essay, David Pellauer draws attention to the “surprising and complex reflection on the theme of what in English we call “ethics.” He warns us to be “careful of our language ... because what Ricœur calls ethics is in some important ways just one moment in the larger scheme of his ethical reflections.” See David Pellauer, “At the Limit of Practical Wisdom: Moral Blindness,” in Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh eds., *Ricœur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 187. Pellauer’s French version of his text was prepared for a Conference at the Université de Picardie-Jules Verne in Amiens, France in 1997 and published in *Documents: Rapports pour l’Éducation* (Paris: Centre national de documentation pédagogique, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-171.

## 32 RICŒUR'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

manifest by his face, and to the third party who is the bearer of rights on the juridical, social, and political plane.”<sup>15</sup>

The autonomous exercise of one's freedom and the right to self-legislation is rendered possible only in the moral awakening of our concern for others—for the Other-- “The autonomy of the self will appear then to be tightly bound up with solicitude for one's neighbor and with justice for each individual.”<sup>16</sup>

As for the passage from ethics to morality, with its imperatives and prohibitions, this seemed to Ricœur “to be called for by ethics itself, as soon as the wish for a good life runs up against violence in all its forms.”<sup>17</sup>

The respect of the Other and even of the self, answers to the moral level of esteem of self and of the Other which accomplishes mutual friendship on the ethical level, in the same way as the principles of equitable justice answer to the wish of living together which establishes the common good:

It will then remain to show in what way the conflicts ... closely tied to the deontological moment lead us back from morality to ethics, but to an ethics enriched by the passage through the norm and exercising moral judgment in a given situation.<sup>18</sup>

Ricœur is referring here to those situations that he calls “situations of distress,” in which the choice is not between good and bad but between bad and worse, between gray and gray.

“Practical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by solicitude, by betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Ethics and the Capable Human Being**

Ricœur's studies on ethics are linked to the theme of the Capable Human Being. After dealing with fallible, frail, faulted human being in the three books that comprise the early *Philosophy of the Will—Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1950), *Fallible Man* (1965) and *The Symbolism*

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricœur, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in L.E. Hahn ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Chicago La Salle: Open Court, 1995), 51-52.

<sup>16</sup> Ricœur states: “The autonomy of the self will appear then to be tightly bound up with solicitude for one's neighbor and with justice for each individual.” Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ricœur, “Intellectual Autobiography,” 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 203.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

of *Evil* (1967), he embarked on the question of the subject who speaks, acts, narrates itself and holds itself responsible. This properly ethical capability to hold oneself responsible indicates a subject capable and acting but at the same time passive, suffering, and vulnerable. One is responsible for our own fragility.

According to Ricœur, it is even one of the formulas of the Golden Rule not to treat the Other in a way to leave him or her without a counter-power against oneself. The reflective equilibrium of Ricœur's double approach consists in reminding us these two aspects of our being human—responsible and vulnerable. Their delicate articulation is experienced for instance in friendship. Ricœur writes:

Let us attempt, in conclusion, to take an overview of the entire range of attitudes deployed between the two extremes of the summons to responsibility, where the initiative comes from the Other, and of the [self's] sympathy for the suffering other, where the initiative comes from the loving self, friendship appearing as a midpoint where the self and the Other share equally the same wish to live together. While equality is presupposed in friendship, in the case of the strict command of the other, equality is reestablished only through the recognition by the self of the superiority of the other's authority; in the case of sympathy that comes from the self and extends to the other, equality is reestablished only through the shared admission of fragility, and finally, of mortality."<sup>20</sup>

Why is the theme of practical wisdom introduced by the tragic? This indicates that ethics is caught in situations of conflict and sometimes unsolvable dilemmas.

Sometimes, we are confronted "with a difficult choice, the choice between 'two ethics of distress': the one assumes murder in order to assure the physical survival of the State, in order to preserve the magistrate; the other affirms treason to bear witness."<sup>21</sup>

The link of politics to the ethics of living well or aiming at the good life would be proven if we are able to show that the human being is

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ricœur, "State and Violence," *History and Truth*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 246.



## 34 RICŒUR'S ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

fundamentally defined by powers or capacities that will reach their complete actualization in the social-political realm.

For Ricœur, a reflection on the Capable Human Being—a first stage in a Philosophical Anthropology or a Philosophy of the Human Person—constitutes the anthropological preface required by political philosophy.

A brief examination of the elements of personal identity will help to understand to understand this. This content will be the answers to questions implying the personal pronoun “Who.”

“Who is speaking?” is the most basic question.

Who is acting or who has done this or that action?

Who is telling or narrating the story?

Who is responsible for this damage?

The answers to these questions point to a source that ends in a subject to whom actions good and bad can be imputed, someone capable of pointing to herself or himself as the author of her or his statements can give an answer to the question.

There is still the need to designate the one who does something for certain reasons as being the agent to whom the action can be ascribed and on this basis, morally and legally imputed

We enter a new stage in the constitution of the Capable Human Being with the narrative dimension of identity. The notion of narrative identity constitutes the indispensable link between the identity of a speaking subject and the identity of an ethical-legal subject. The principal reason is that the narrative identity takes into account the *temporal* dimension of existence.

In brief, only a subject capable of evaluating his actions, related to the good or bad, can hold himself in esteem or self-respect. We have to show that it is only in society, only in just institutions that a Capable Human Being becomes an acting, existing, historical subject.

The truly critical point is the moment when the relation to others, as it multiplies, to the mediation of the institution. It is not with the pair I-near Other that we should stop. We must advance to the distant others, the third parties or each and everyone.

This brings us to our capacity to own our action: a capacity to impute responsibility on myself for acts in which I recognize myself as the true author.

### **Ethics and Reciprocity**

The situations that call for ethics are *asymmetrical*.

There is a limit in putting oneself in the place of the other. The problem is to join with the other in his or her place but not to substitute

oneself for him or her. There is a level where reciprocity is required. This is in esteem and respect and not the capacity to be or to act.

But what remains human, the last glimmer of the human is the capacity to enter into the relation “giving and receiving”.

Defending to the end this capacity of exchange in giving and receiving is the practice of your own humanity. From this viewpoint, we need to help the seriously ill patient to continue to be a giver and not simply a receiver. When you give the seriously economic poor, you encourage them not to be only a receiver but to be a creative giver, not in terms of money, not to you, but to others like them.

A human being can only survive if he is able to give.

*University of Santo Tomas  
Ateneo de Manila University  
The Philippines*

## References

- Almario, Virgilio ed., *UP Diksiyonaryong Filipino* (Mandaluyong City: Anvil Publishing, 2001).
- Cohen, Richard A. and Marsh, James L. eds., *Ricœur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002).
- Johnson, Greg S. and Stiver, Dan R. eds., *Paul Ricœur: The Task of Political Philosophy: Studies in the Thought of Paul Ricœur* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).
- Pellauer, David, “At the Limit of Practical Wisdom: Moral Blindness,” in Richard A. Cohen and James L. Marsh eds., *Ricœur as Another: The Ethics of Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002). [An earlier version of this source is published in *Documents: Rapports pour l'Éducation* (Paris: Centre national de documentation pédagogique, 1998)].
- Ricœur, Paul, Ricœur, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in L.E. Hahn ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Chicago La Salle: Open Court, 1995).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Soi-même comme un autre*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990).
- \_\_\_\_\_, “State and Violence,” in *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).
- \_\_\_\_\_, “The Moral, the Ethical, and the Political,” in Greg S. Johnson and Dan R. Stiver eds., *Paul Ricœur: The Task of Political Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).
- Tillich, Paul, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1952).

## Writing as Praxis: Quito and Sartre on Literature as Philosophy

---

**Marella Ada Mancenido-Bolaños**

**Abstract:** Emerita Quito's *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre* was delivered during her inaugural and second lecture as Professorial Chair in Humanities in 1980 and 1981. These lectures focus on the, then, underexplored themes found in Sartre's writings—his thoughts on Marxism and literature. This short piece will focus on the second part of Quito's lecture on the relationship between philosophy and literature. Quito's discussion of Sartre on literature will be rehearsed, intertwined with a presentation of how Sartre's philosophical ideas are presented in some of his literary writings. Inspired by Quito's reading of Sartre, what this piece will demonstrate is the inextricable relationship between philosophy and literature—both are committed to writing as praxis or the praxis of writing about significant human experiences.

**Keywords:** Quito, Sartre, existentialism, philosophy and literature

### Sartre's Philosophy in Literature

Quito's *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre*, delivered during her inaugural and second lecture as Professorial Chair in Humanities on 5 December 1980 and 6 March 1981, is an important intervention. These lectures focus on the underexplored themes found in Sartre's philosophy, particularly his thoughts on Marxism and literature. The second part of lecture, titled "His Literature as Philosophy," explicates the philosophical dimension of Sartre's literature, the literary dimension of Sartre's philosophy, and the importance of writing as a form of commitment: through philosophy and literature, writing constitutes a synthetic unity for the material groundedness of our experience of freedom. Following Quito, Sartre's philosophy is literature and his literature is philosophy. She, moreover, states that until the twentieth century, "a clear though undrawn line had separated literature and

philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> The perception at that time was that philosophy is essentially argumentative and persuasive, while literature is essentially an art and an imitation of life.<sup>2</sup> Quoting Stephen Ross, “Art is art and it cannot be expected to serve a philosophic purpose.”<sup>3</sup>

Against this prejudice of a disciplinary divide, Sartre’s literature can be considered historical because the novels include portrayals of different epochs in history which serve to condition both mediate and immediate situations as their respective historical background—more often, situations which Sartre’s protagonists must overcome. In fact, both Sartre’s literature and philosophy are materially grounded in concrete history. For Quito, Sartre’s literature introduces us to the

... world of paradoxes and complexities wherein the characters seem to have only one aim: to assert their freedom by doing the opposite of what they want, and, in the process, they become sacrificial lambs on the altar of freedom.<sup>4</sup>

To understand his literature better, one must go back to his philosophy. And if one searches for practical examples of his philosophical ideas, one can turn to his literature, as themes in his literature are intertwined with his philosophy. Theories could be creatively narrated inasmuch as they could be abundantly insightful. On the one hand, the demand to think about a theory of freedom purely in ontological terms was first developed in *Being and Nothingness*. On the other hand, the desire to tell the story of freedom is seen as the major theme of his novels and plays. One may simply recall the people and characters who struggle with different experiences of freedom (or the lack of it)—Jean Genet, Estelle, Garcin, Inez, Frantz, and Antoine Roquentin. Take for example, *Nausea*—stylistically presented as a compilation of Roquentin’s diary. Here, one finds his struggle as an individual search for the meaning of existence. Roquentin, being caught up with his past, and believing that he has already achieved so much, realizes later that he is still in search of something he cannot even specify. Interestingly, the French philosophy of the 1960s, which is often cited as the origin of the excesses of postmodernism, does not actually use the term. While Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard draw direct parallels to postmodernism, their interpretations differ significantly from the widely

---

<sup>1</sup> Emerita Quito, *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1981), 25.

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

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

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

accepted contemporary understanding of the concept. Behind this is a theory of anthropology stemming from Claude Lévi-Strauss, called structuralism. Of course, it is 'textbook common sense' to accept poststructuralism, which emerged as a critique of structuralism, as another name for postmodernism. However, poststructuralism, sometimes interchange with deconstruction, is only a convenient term, and the designation is not found in France, the birthplace of this intellectual movement.

When Sartre speaks about freedom, he presents it as a *freedom to*. This implies that there is already a primordial assumption that each human being is gifted with freedom, and what is only left is to will oneself to practice one's freedom. For one to speak of action, one must also take into consideration the concept of intention.<sup>5</sup> Through intention, our very being is transformed from a mere pre-reflective state into fully becoming a being for-itself (*pour soi*). We may be capable of acting, but do we intend to act? In short, one may be capable of freedom, but will one intend to be free? Furthermore, Sartre claims:

It is freedom which is the foundation of all essences since man reveals intra-mundane essences by surpassing the world toward his own possibilities .... My freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is the very stuff of my being.<sup>6</sup>

The quotation above indicates how each human being (as *pour soi*) demonstrates an inherent freedom. It is the very essence of man, it is his very constitution, and yet, for fear of not being accountable for his own freedom, man chooses to submit his freedom to another being. In most cases, the weight of one's situational belongingness brings a discomfort within man's consciousness of his freedom, leading him astray from his genuine state or authentic existence, and even drives him further away from it. Not recognizing this freedom (as involving the intentionality warranted for responsibly owning one's actions) at the core of our very being reduces us back to the pre-reflective state, i.e., a being in-itself (*en soi*). Another key term in man's search for his authentic existence is the concept of projection. Projection happens when a being sees a possibility for itself. "The recognition

---

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 1956), 410.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 414–415.

of one's freedom comes with anguish."<sup>7</sup> Quoting Sartre, John Duncan states that:

Thus a person is most comprehensively understood in the terms of his or her particular, basic project. "My ultimate and initial project ... is ... always the outline of a solution of the problem of being. We are this solution 'as the project-for-itself of being in-itself.' Each human life is an attempted solution to the paradox of being a free project to become a completed and lack-less thing."<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of *Nausea*, Roquentin experiences a re-awakening—perhaps his *true* awakening. This was the moment when he came face-to-face with the problem of existence and its meaning: his coming to terms with absurdity, and the awareness of his superfluity are already the symptoms of his anxiety. Sartre narrates an important insight from Roquentin's re-awakening:

Existence is not something which allows itself to be thought of from a distance; it has to invade you suddenly, pounce upon you, weigh heavily on your heart like a huge motionless animal—or else there is nothing left at all.<sup>9</sup>

This is Roquentin's experiences of emptiness and weariness. After meeting with Anny, he decides to abandon Bouville and permanently settle in Paris. If one interprets this specific plot, we can safely assume that it could be his desire to return to his in-itself, to once again try to overcome his anxiety and assert what he thought to be his freedom. For a time in Bouville, Roquentin felt trapped by his assumed obligation—that is, to finish writing about Monsieur de Rollebon. Finally, when he realizes that it was something he can no longer do, Roquentin goes back to asserting his freedom and simultaneously willing himself to project another becoming.

In another entry, Roquentin narrates and reflects about a scene in Café Mably, where other patrons were talking about their pasts. Roquentin reflects: "They would like us to make believe that their past isn't wasted, that their memories have been condensed and gently transformed into

---

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

<sup>8</sup> John Duncan, "Sartre's Pure Critical Theory," *Phaenex*, 4:2 (Fall/Winter 2009), 141.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New York: Penguin Books LTD, 1963), 189.

## 40 WRITING AS PRAXIS

Wisdom.”<sup>10</sup> At this point, he is not criticizing the patrons; he was merely trying to relate their experiences with his, because for a moment Roquentin felt that his very own past and adventures have merited him some sense of wisdom only to realize later that his own claim to wisdom is hollow: “The truth suddenly dawns upon me: this man is going to die before long.”<sup>11</sup> He was not pertaining to another person’s death, but was merely speaking about his own fear to die and be forgotten by people. When a human being encounters fear, devising a defense mechanism may be a first reaction. In the case of Roquentin, he re-channels his fear by focusing on what he supposes would happen to the other patron.

The doctor would like to believe in it, he would like to shut his eyes to the unbearable reality: that he is alone, without any attainment, without any past, with a mind which is growing duller, a body which is disintegrating.<sup>12</sup>

This reveals a fear for death. This particular projection, that he was speaking of his own anxiousness is further revealed in another of Roquentin’s entries: “I must not be frightened.”<sup>13</sup>

“An existent can never justify the existence of another existent,”<sup>14</sup> Roquentin claims in relation to the desire to anchor his life with that of Anny’s. With his re-awakening comes his fervent understanding that he is solely responsible for himself, and that no one should be held liable for the consequences of his action, except himself, because he has the choice to stay with or abandon his situation. He may have failed in his endeavors, and he might have blamed Anny and the entire society for such failures, but his realization towards the end leads Roquentin to an understanding of his own cause and freedom. We find similar theoretical insights in *No Exit*, where we read the line “hell is other people.” This could be explained as an inability to transcend the conditions and situations pre-determined by something external to our being: When one cannot break away from the modes of conduct prescribed by other people, or when one does not seek a way out

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 104. David Weberman states that “Fear is not originally consciousness of being afraid, any more than the perception of this book is consciousness of perceiving the book. Emotional consciousness is, at first, unreflective, and on this plane it can be conscious of itself only on the non-positional mode. Emotional consciousness is, at first, consciousness of the world.” See David Weberman, “Sartre, Emotions, and Wallowing,” *Philosophical Quarterly*, 33:4 (October 1996), 393–407.

<sup>14</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 252.

from the opinion of other people. The three characters (Inez, Garcin and Estelle) are already in hell even before they died because they have allowed themselves to be conditioned by the situations they were in.

Quito is correct to point out that the novels and plays written by one of France's most celebrated public intellectuals are indeed abundantly insightful for readers who are enticed by their philosophical curiosity, as evidenced in *Nausea* and *No Exit*. Sartre's literary style is effective in explicating his existential notion of freedom. What matters most is how Quito situates Sartre's literature as an explicit philosophical praxis, contrary to the presumption of an existing disciplinary divide between philosophy and literature. Quito's reading of Sartre invites us to rethink our position on the nature of a philosophical praxis, and to recover the almost-forgotten rootedness of both philosophy and literature in the humanities. In doing so, we realize that in both philosophy and literature are committed to writing as praxis and, more specifically, the praxis of writing significant human experiences, such as, freedom.

### **Sartre on Literature: Between Commitment and Separation**

Writing is the expression of what is truly human: genuinely free and authentic and characterized by complexities and imperfections. In Sartre's book *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, he discussed the importance of writing and literature and their inherent components. He initially presents the struggles that writers encounter, and the brief moment of relief they experience once they are able to finish the work:

When one is writing works which are non-philosophical, while still ruminating on philosophy—as I have been doing for most of my time over the last ten years—every page, every line, suffers from hernia.<sup>15</sup>

Sartre is probably referencing his own difficulties when he is writing. Sartre adds, "What is primary is what I haven't written—what I intend to write and what perhaps I will never write."<sup>16</sup> There is always a discomfort that warrants our understanding in each novel or work of literature encountered, more so when it involves our own writing. In his unfinished work on Flaubert,<sup>17</sup> Sartre wanted to analyze and show that literature is "a

---

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: New Left Books, 1974), 10.

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

<sup>17</sup> At least, during the time when this interview was done.



## 42 WRITING AS PRAXIS

pure art of deriving all its rules from its own essence, conceals its author's commitment and his fiery opinions on every sort of subject-including social and political questions."<sup>18</sup> Flaubert has always been Sartre's personal favorite, but his criticisms on *Madame Bovary* was not merely to show how good a writer Flaubert was. It must be understood that Sartre made use of literature to present its beauty and to somehow create an undertone of persistent issues that he wanted to discuss.<sup>19</sup>

I think it would be more logical for people to accuse me of exaggerating its importance. The beauty of literature lies in its desire to be everything—and not in a sterile quest for beauty. Only a whole can be beautiful: those who can't understand this-whatever may have said-have not attacked me in the name of art, but in the name of their particular commitment.<sup>20</sup>

Sartre was writing towards greater freedom, emphasizing that the object of each novel should always be the human object, because a novel becomes nothing without human significations. His works are conscious of his readership, while his audience is comprised of students, teachers and people who love reading. He finds it honorable when the reader freely allows himself to be influenced by what he is reading. Sartre wanted to pass on something that he himself felt, something that he has experienced and thought of. His work *Loser Wins*<sup>21</sup> is an actual representation of his experiences in the current state of French society, including the violence which stirred individuals during that time.

Furthermore, Sartre notes that "man lives in the midst of images. Literature offers him a critical image of himself."<sup>22</sup> Literature becomes a human being's critical reflection, representing to us the gap between the prestige of a form (e.g., an idea of an authentic existence) and the current shortcomings of concrete human reality. As a form of projection, the critically-reflective dimension of literature narrates the progression of *what is* towards *what could be*, or vice versa. It could even bridge this gap between them. To achieve this, it is necessary for the individual to come to terms with

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> An example of this claim was when he wrote novels like *Nausea*, *The Wall*, and *Intimacy*. *Nausea* definitely has a very existential undertone, *The Wall* portrays man's struggle in the society, and *Intimacy* speaks of bad faith in a particular relationship that one encounters.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Referred to as *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* in French. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Loser Wins*, trans. by David J. Gloyd (New York: Vintage, 1960).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

the actual material social reality, i.e., to be involved with and committed to it. This is the very reason why Sartre has turned to literature, particularly the act of writing, to formulate what he considered to be a standard intellectual practice. For literature possesses an absolute value: It can *save an individual or simply transform one*. Literature can only be “absolute when it is preserved in other people’s memories, when it is integrated into the objective spirit.”<sup>23</sup> Every literature that is historically deemed as a classic is a proof of each their respective author’s commitment to their species-being (i.e., the human), and reveals their concrete engagement with human experiences.

Meanwhile, as Quito pointed in her *Homage*, the critical component of Sartre’s literature and the idea of commitment in writing should agree with his own philosophical enterprise, lest we find a theoretical deficit in Sartre’s literature or a practical limitation in his philosophy. Sartre’s literature should then give importance to that specific philosophical insight regarding separation as transcendental, i.e., being *pour soi*’s transcendence as becoming separate from the initial situation, from the pre-given determinations of the collective, and from the manifest self-externalizations or the fruits of one’s own labor. One must further inquire: Does commitment involve a writer’s conformity with the status quo? And can we even separate the writer from the written text? We may find in Sartre’s philosophy an interesting (albeit nuanced) position.

Indeed, when Sartre was explicitly condemning the *Prague Manifesto* in the “Artist and his Conscience,” he comments that we must be careful to treat the artist and their crafts differently: “The life of the musician may be exemplary” but such characteristic of a person remains to be *external* to his work, and that “the artist must not be the commentary on his work.”<sup>24</sup> Here, readers see an insight first elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*, that being *pour soi*, in the desire to become (and remain) self-conscious but only acquires the knowledge of the *en soi*, further resists becoming its own reduction. Meaning to say, the transcendence of our being for-itself requires that we must not merely become our being-in-itself. In the same way, the musician (i.e., a being *pour soi*) is not reducible to his music (i.e., his being *en soi*). The separation between the artist and his art must clearly be drawn in order to maintain the freedom of the artist from both the definitions of the art of music and the musical scores he composes as his own self-determinations. How then should we conceive of art as a manifestation of the artist’s commitment to his being, his Other, and his social belongingness?

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Artist and His Conscience,” in *Situations*, trans. by Benita Eisler (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), 31. The essay originally was published in 1950 as a preface to René Leibowitz’s *L’artiste et sa conscience: Esquisse d’une dialectique de la conscience artistique* (Paris: L’Arche, 1950).

## 44 WRITING AS PRAXIS

This idea of separation seems to contradict Sartre's point about the commitment in/of writing, specifically the writer's commitment to the object of his works. Simply put, against any form of commitment, separation somehow severs the connection between human beings and their labor-fulfillment, between artists and their works of art, and more specifically, the authors and their written text. In "What is Writing?," Sartre, however, treats the poet and his words to be of the same categorization, since the otherwise would lead to the reduction of words into pure abstractions:

... the writer should engage [himself] completely in [his] works, and not as an abject passivity by putting forward [his] vices, [his] misfortunes, and [his] weaknesses, but as a resolute will and as a choice, as this total enterprise of living that each one of us is.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Sartre presents to us the distinction between the poet and the prose writer. On the one hand, poets are "men who refuse to utilize language,"<sup>26</sup> since they consider words as things and not signs. Poets are thought to be outside of language.<sup>27</sup> There is indeed a separation between the word and what it signifies, inasmuch as there is always more in a phrase and in a verse. On the other hand, Sartre distinguishes the prose writer as "a man who makes use of words."<sup>28</sup> In a prose, the word has a particular meaning at that particular moment—there is no meaning outside of it.<sup>29</sup> Sartre also talks about the engaged writer who knows that words are actions.<sup>30</sup> He is aware that to reveal "is to change and one can reveal only by planning change."<sup>31</sup> In a sense, the engaged prose-writer already has an intention to transform the material social conditions, including the very conditions of their writing. They write something that is "worth the trouble of being communicated."<sup>32</sup>

Since engagement is equivocal with commitment, Sartre was convinced that writers have to become the very words they invent as against

---

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Writing?," in *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. by Bernard Fretchman (New York: Citadel Press, 1969), 35.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1969), 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

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

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

the creation of pure significations without a signifier.<sup>33</sup> The commitment of the writer is expressed in every poem and prose they would write. Sartre was arguing for the writers' commitments not only to the words invented, but also to their material-social belongingness. We do not become writers because we choose to put reality into words, but rather we become authorial subjects because we choose to say them "in a certain way"<sup>34</sup>—words transparent to our own being. But if we become committed, how can we still show separation as important in the realization of our subjectivity (as being for-itself)? In fact, how can we conceive of separation as authentic [act] in the face of commitment being our ultimate self-expression?

Perhaps the answer lies in mediation between separation and commitment: separation-*as*-commitment. Although this is something implicit to Sartre's work, the notion of separation-*as*-commitment provides a synthetic unification of the *pour soi* between being separated and being committed within ourselves. Such idea of separation-*as*-commitment is initially hinted in Sartre's description literature's criticality in the essay "The Purpose of Writing." Sartre claims that

Art in its totality is in range in the activity of a single man, as he tests and pushes back its limits. But writing cannot be critical without calling everything into question: this is its contents. The adventures of writing undertaken by each writer challenges the whole of mankind. Both those who read and those who do not. Any string of words *whatsoever* (assuming the writer has talent)—even a sentence describing the virgin forest—calls everything we have done into question, and poses the issue of *legitimacy*.<sup>35</sup>

One should understand that to be separated neither means a fissure into our being nor the sense of psychological unity of self-consciousness diminished. Separation-*as*-commitment, in Sartre's jargon of authenticity, meant initially the ability to remain in the completeness of our *pour soi* on the level of our individuality. It does not mean that we must live a lonely existence as individuals, but rather to be able to fulfill this individuality despite our commitments to the material social conditions, whether they

---

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, here we Sartre showing his contempt against the structuralist movement of the 1950s.

<sup>34</sup> Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Purposes of Writing," in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. by John Matthews (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 26.

would be the people, society in general, or historical events. This idea of separation-*as*-commitment is also present in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Despite our praxis transforming us into becoming part of the collective or groups, it is necessary to freely effectuate this transformation as a decision of the individual—still aiming to discover our subjectivity in being separated while being committed.<sup>36</sup> We should never simply let external factors (such as the products of our labor, the workings of society, or the hell we find as other people) to fully determine our being for-itself. The case should be the opposite: our being for-itself should internalize them into determinations we *freely* choose to affect us, ultimately maintaining the wholeness of our becoming.

Finally, the notion of separation-*as*-commitment could be used as a framework for the possibilities of critique. It is possible for us to be in the contradictions of being separated while being committed as critics. In the dynamics of criticism (philosophical or literary), we may find our *pour soi* becoming separated against the backdrop of a certain organization of the social, the literary, and the aesthetic, while remaining to be committed in the material conditions of life and the valuations we bring into it. Meaning to say, a critic finds himself, discovers the fullness of his own being for-itself, in the act of separating himself (both ontologically and politically) by transcending from the totality and ultimately changing it towards further development—an act of commitment that marks our groundedness to where we belong. The critical importance of separation-*as*-commitment renders the possibility of engaging through the choices we make: between the acts of separating our authentic wholeness from the majority, and the acts of committing ourselves in affectively changing them.

Thus, in the essay “Why Write?,” Sartre finally addresses the titular question by saying “to write is to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader.”<sup>37</sup> The commitments of the writer lie in separation, by allowing the readers to recreate and keep alive what the writer discloses. Perhaps the real task of writing does not habituate in the attempt to imitate reality (e.g., reproduce the system) and narrate its totality into texts, but rather it is found in the attempt to recreate a reality better than the author's. This is only possible through the combined efforts of the author in committing to write, the readers to engage with the texts, and the texts themselves to intervene with concrete material social reality. Of course, Sartre notes that there is no gloomy literature, because no matter how dark the literature may be, it is only so “that free men may feel their freedom as they

---

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. by Jonathan Rée (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 24.

<sup>37</sup> Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism*, 60.

face it.”<sup>38</sup> Writing presupposes freedom on the part of the author and the reader. Once the work is done, the reader takes on the freedom of the author.

Going back to Quito’s reading of Sartre, we find that it is difficult for one to distinguish the disciplinary borders between Sartre’s literature and philosophy. Can we consider literary works with philosophical undertones to be philosophy? Sartre is an exemption, because the strong links between his literary and philosophical works are explicit. His discussions of freedom in his novels and plays correspond to how he discussed this notion in his philosophical *oeuvre*. Literature for Sartre is an instrument to stage and deliver concepts from his philosophical enterprise (ranging from purely ontological discussion of being to its practical engagements in politics), making them accessible to both philosophical and non-philosophical readership. This describes how he was able to present his views on politics and philosophy through literature, including his commitments. Quoting Quito:

Jean-Paul Sartre is unique in the annals of Literature and Philosophy; he is not only a philosopher who dabbled in literature, nor only a man of letters who dabbled in philosophy. Sartre is pre-eminent in both, and it can be said that his philosophy is literature and his literature is philosophy.<sup>39</sup>

From what has been discussed, one comes to an understanding that Jean-Paul Sartre was committed to his responsibility as a writer and as a philosopher. He was able to inflict persistent issues of the society into the minds of people, encouraging them to be more critical about their society and their social belongingness. Sartre was able to live up to the standard that he raised—to be considered as a writer whose texts could *save an individual* or *simply transform one*. Quito herself was definitely one of those transformed by Sartre. Quito’s *Homage* is but a radical intervention reflecting Sartre’s implicit normative prescription *to be more political and to be more critical*. This is further supported by the fact that her forementioned lectures (which definitely involved a philosophical discussion on freedom) were delivered during the Martial Law era in the Philippines—a time when the genuine freedom of thought and speech experienced state policing. And of course, they were not the last time she would lecture on Sartre’s literature and philosophy, and the interventions she made into UST’s philosophical history is a concrete proof of how a reader could engage with an author’s text and transforms the [philosophical] landscape that came afterwards. Sartre has lived for the

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> Quito, *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre*, 42.

freedom of others. The persistent themes of his novels only show us how devoted he was in making people realize that their freedom must not be limited to them alone, but must move with the circumstances of their historical and social belongingness.

*Department of Philosophy  
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

- Duncan, John, "Sartre's Pure Critical Theory," *Phaenex*, 4:2 (Fall/Winter 2009).  
Quito, Emerita, *Homage to Jean-Paul Sartre* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1981).  
René Leibowitz's *L'artiste et sa conscience: Equisse d'une dialectique de la conscience artistique* (Paris: L'Arche, 1950).  
Sartre, Jean-Paul, "The Artist and His Conscience," in *Situations*, trans. by Benita Eisler (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965).  
\_\_\_\_\_, "The Purposes of Writing," in *Between Existentialism and Marxism*, trans. by John Matthews (London and New York: Verso, 2004).  
\_\_\_\_\_, "What is Writing?," in *Literature and Existentialism*, trans. by Bernard Fretchman (New York: Citadel Press, 1969).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp, 1956).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (New York: New Left Books, 1974).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. by Jonathan Rée (London and New York: Verso, 2004).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Literature and Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1969).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Loser Wins*, trans. by David J. Gloyd (New York: Vintage, 1960).  
\_\_\_\_\_, *Nausea* (New York: Penguin Books LTD, 1963).  
Weberman, David, "Sartre, Emotions, and Wallowing," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 33:4 (October 1996).

## Si Santo Tomas, Relihiyon, at Pilosopiyang Franses: Ilang Leksyon para sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino

---

**Jovito V. Cariño**

**Abstract:** There is large gap in the discussion of religion in the philosophical tradition of France. The debate in the 1930s about Christian philosophy was merely the result of an earlier and larger conflict about the relationship between philosophy and faith, expressed in Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (1879). The Pope called for a renewal of the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas as a response to the challenges of modernity, presenting Aquinas as a model of "Christian philosophy." Despite this call, secular French philosophers, including some Catholic and Thomist scholars, were convinced that it was not possible for philosophy to be Christian or for Christianity to be philosophical. A debate was organized by French scholars to discuss whether or not there was a Christian philosophy and whether it had a place in French intellectual culture. This paper aims to highlight the contribution of philosopher Etienne Gilson to the said debate, as well as his approach to the philosophy of Saint Thomas and its relationship to French philosophy. In addition, the paper will also present some points that may be beneficial to Filipino philosophy.

**Keywords:** Gilson, Christian philosophy, Thomism, religion

**M**alaki ang naging bahagi ng Fransya sa búhay ni Santo Tomas. Bagaman ipinanganak at lumaki sa Italya, matatandâan na mahabang panahon siyang namalagi sa Fransya, partikular sa Unibersidad ng Paris, para mag-aral at magturò. Sa katunayan, maliban sa maikling panahon na initigil niya sa Alemanya (sa Cologne, kasama ni San Alberto Magno), masasabi na ang kalakhan ng kanyang mahigit kumulang na tatlong dekada bílang frayle at propesor ay ginugol niya sa dadalawang teritoryo lámang: sa Italya at Fransya. Tubòng Italya man, hindî maikakailâ ang espesyal na papel ng Fransya sa kanyang búhay, lalò na sa hulíng yugtò nito. Sa Fransya sana ang hulíng misyon ni Santo Tomas bago ang kanyang hindî inaasahang pagkamatay noong 7 Marso 1274. Mulâ sa kombento sa



Napoles, tumungò sa Fransya si Santo Tomas para dumalo sana bílang *peritus* sa Konseho ng Lyons sa inbitasyon ng nanunungkulang Papa noon, si Papa Gregorio X. Binawian ng búhay si Santo Tomas dahil sa isang aksidente bago pa makarating sa nasabing konseho. Nang mabalitàn ito, agad hiniling ng mga propesor ng Facultad ng Arte sa Unibersidad ng Paris sa maestro heneral ng mga Dominiko ang mga naiwang sulating pilosopikal ni Santo Tomas.<sup>1</sup> Makalipas ang ilang dekada, sa Fransya rin magaganap ang kanyang kanonisasyon, sa syudad ng Avignon, noong 18 Hulyo 1323. Sa kasalukuyan, ang mga labî ni Santo Tomas ay matatagpûan sa Toulouse, sa katimugang bahagi ng Fransya.<sup>2</sup> Gayunman, makasaysayan man ang Fransya sa kanyang búhay, hindî ito ang dahilan kung bakit masasabing may papel si Santo Tomas sa ebolusyon ng pilosopiyang Franses. Magkakahugis ang papel na ito sa katagalan pa, sa katunayan, sa unang bahagi pa ng ikadalawampûng siglo, partikular sa dekada trenta, nang magsimulâ ang mga debate sa Fransya tungkol “Kristyanong pilosopiya.” Pakay ng nasabing mga debate na pagusapan ang paksâ na ang Kristyano at pilosopiya raw ay magkasalungat kayâ hindî posibleng pagsamahin. Ang totoo, ang nasabing pananaw ay laganap, hindî lámang sa Fransya kundî sa kalakhan ng buông Europa. Ang pagtutol sa ugnayan ng Kristyanidad at pilosopiya ang ibinabandera ng kampong rasyonalista.<sup>3</sup> Ang paninindigan naman ng Simbahan tungkol sa usaping ito ay isinaad ng *Aeterni Patris* na isinapubliko ni Papa Leo XIII noong 1879. Laban sa tila malabis na pagpapahalaga sa rason at pagsasantabi sa pananamapalatayâ, nanawagan si Papa Leo XIII na mulîng lingunin ang kaisipan ni Santo Tomas bílang pangtapat sa modernong konsepto ng katwiran at upang pagtibayin din ang Kristyanong pilosopiya.<sup>4</sup> Ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ang sagot ng Simbahan laban sa modernidad; kinailangang pag-usapan at himayin ito nang sa gayo’y matugunan ang mga intelektwal na hámon ng modernong panahon. Kasama ang pangalan ni Etienne Gilson sa listahan ng mga Katolikong pilosoper na nagsulong ng sariwà at naiibang pagbasa sa mga kaisipan ni Santo Tomas gaya ng

<sup>1</sup> Jan A. Aertesen, “Aquinas’s philosophy in its historical setting” sa Kretzmann, Norman & Eleonore Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13–14.

<sup>2</sup> Para sa awtoritatibong bayograpiya ni Santo Tomas, tingnan James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas D’Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974) at Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and his Work*, trans. by Robert Royal, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 8–10.

<sup>4</sup> Sa katunayan, ang salin sa Ingles ng *Aeterni Patris* ay may sub-titulong “Tungkol sa Pagpapanumbalik ng Kristyanong Pilosopiya.” Tingnan Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, in *The Holy See: Daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, <[https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)>.

panawagan ni Papa Leo XIII. Maraming mambabása, Katoliko man at hindi, ang tumitingalâ at tumatangkilik sa mga akdâ ni Gilson sa loob at labas ng Fransya. Siya rin ang isa sa mga nagsulong at primerong kalahok sa nabanggit na mga debate tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Sa panayam na ito, babalikan ko ang nasabing debate na may partikular na tutok sa naging kontribusyon ni Gilson. Una, tatalakayin ko ang batayan ng posisyon ni Gilson tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Pangalawa, susuriin ko ang nasabing posisyon at ang relasyon nito sa posisyon ng mga kapwâ niya Katoliko at Tomistang iskolar. Sa pangatlo at hulíng bahagi, maglalahad ako ng mga konsiderasyon para maisulong ang pamimilosopiyang Kristyano sa Pilipinas kasabay ng pagpapayaman ng pamimilosopiyang Filipino.

### Si Gilson at Kristyanong Pilosopiya

Matagal na at mahabà ang kwentong kinapapalooban ng Kristyanidad at pilosopiya. Ang kwentong ito ay nagsimulâ sa mismong pagsilang ng Kristyanidad gaya ng nakasaad sa Mga Gawâ ng mga Apostoles kung saan mababása ang pagpapakilala ni San Pablo ng tinawag niyang “Nakakubling Diyos” sa mga kausap niyang Epikuryano at Estoiko. Ayon kay San Pablo, ang Diyos na hindi pa kilala ng kanyang mga kausap na Griyego ang katuparan ng mismong karunungan na kanilang hinahanap (Mga Gawâ 17:16–34). Sa simulâ rin ng ebanghelyo ayon kay San Juan, inilarawan niya ang Diyos bílang *logos*, o salitâ na kumakatawan, tulad ng paniniwalâ ng mga Griyego, sa karunungan na siyang pinanggálingan at kahihinatnan ng lahat (Juan 1:1–5).<sup>5</sup> Bagaman taglay ng tao ang bakás nito, laging higit at lampas ang karunongang ito sa kanyang talino. Dagdag pa ni San Pablo, kahit gaano kataas, ang talino ng tao ay mistulang kalokohan lámang kompara sa Diyos na siyang tunay na karunungan (1 Cor 1:18–31). Para sa Diyos, ang karunungan ay hindi daloy ng isip kundî pulso ng pag-ibig (Santiago 3:13–18). Sa Kristyanong tradisyon, mamamalas ang lalim ng karunungan ng Diyos sa mismong pagaalay ni Kristo ng sarili sa krus. Si Kristo na itinuturing na balakid ng mga Hudyo at katatawanan para sa mga Hentil ay ang mismong karunungan ng Diyos sa anyô ng pag-ibig na handâng maglaan ng sarili para sa iba (1 Cor 1:19–25).

Kung ang pilosopiya ay paghahangad ng karunungan at ang Kristyanidad ang paghahanap sa Diyos na siya mismong karunungan, tila

---

<sup>5</sup> Makikita rin ang ganitong pananaw kay Philo ng Alexandria o kilala rin sa tawag na Philo ang Hudyo. Para sa kaugnayan ng Hudyo at Kristiyanong kaisipan, tingnan Peter Schafer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), 52–54. Tinalakay din ito ni Etienne Gilson sa kanyang diskusyon tungkol kay San Clemente ng Alexandria at Orihen sa Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1955), 29–43.

hindî nga imposibleng ipalagay na ang Kristyanidad ay pwedeng maging pilosopikal at ang pilosopiya ay maaaring maging Kristyano. Ganito ang pananaw ni San Justino Martir, isang sinaunang Griyegong Kristyano na babád sa pilosopiya ni Pitagoras, Platon at Aristoteles. Para sa kanya, nasa Kristyanidad ang katuparan ng mga punlâ ng karunongang unang tinukoy ng mga pilosoper ng Gresya. Sila, ayon kay San Justino, ang mga orihinal na anonimong Kristyano sapagkat sila ang naghandâ ng mga turò ng Kristyanidad bago pa ito ipinangaral ni Kristo at mga apostoles. Matatandâan na ang Kristyanidad ay isinilang sa panahon na ang mga Helenistikong pilosopiya gaya ng Estoicismo, Epikuryanismo at Neo-platonismo ay lagapan sa kalakhan ng teritoryong Greco-Romano.<sup>6</sup> Malaki ang inpluwensya ng nabanggit na mga Helenistikong pilosopiya sa pagpapakalat ng pananaw na ang pilosopiya ay hindî lámang sistemang intelektwal kundî isang paraan ng pamumuhay. Sa madalíng salitâ, normal noon ang pagtingin sa pilosopiya bílang isang relihiyon. Sinomang nais mamilosopiya ay kinakailangang sumanib sa isang komunidad na kumakatawan sa urì ng pamumuhay na nais niyang yakapin at sundan, Estoico man ito, Epikuryano o Neo-platoniko. Maliban dito’y kailangan din niyang ilaan ang sarili sa pagsasabúhay ng mga aral ng komunidad na kanyang sasalihan. Ang pilosopiya sa panahong iyon ay magkakasabay na giya, daan at sasakyan tungò sa isang makahulogang búhay. Ang layon nito ay karunungan na mamamalas hindî sa pagiging magalíng (ibig sabihin, maabilidad) kundî sa pagiging *magalíng* (ibig sabihin, walâ ng karamdaman).<sup>7</sup> Sa madalíng salitâ, ang pilosopiya, ayon sa mga Helenista, ay isang lunas o *pharmakon*. Pinagagalíng nito ang isip pati na ang katawan ng tao sa pamamagitan ng pagtuturò kung paano mamuhay ayon sa nararapat.<sup>8</sup> Isinilang ang Kristyanidad, gaya ng nabanggit na, sa panahon na lagapan na ang iba’t ibang komunidad ng Helenistang pilosopiya. Ang yugtò tungkol sa diskusyong namagitan kay San Pablo at mga Estoico at Epikuryanong pilosoper sa Athena ay katibayan ng pakikipagsabayan ng Kristyanidad sa nasabing mga pilosopiya. Sa katunayan, marami sa mga unang Kristyano ay gáling na sa mga umiiral nang mga pilosopikal na komunidad o naghahanap pa lámang ng komunidad na sasalihan. Isang halimbawà nito ang isang

<sup>6</sup> Tingnan Hans Diether Betz, “The Birth of Christianity as a Hellenistic Religion: Three Theories of Origin,” in *The Journal of Religion*, 74:1 (January 1994), 1–25; Hans Diether Betz, “Antiquity and Christianity,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117:1 (Spring 1998), 3–22; Marcel Simon, “Early Christianity and Pagan Thought: Confluences and Conflicts,” in *Religious Studies*, 9:4 (December 1973), 385–399; at C. Wilfred Griggs, “Rediscovering Ancient Christianity,” in *Brigham Young University Studies*, 38:4 (1999), 73–90.

<sup>7</sup> Tingnan sa Gisela Striker, “Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquility,” in *The Monist*, 73:1 “Hellenistic Ethics” (January 1990), 97–110.

<sup>8</sup> Tingnan sa Martha Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

lalaking nagnangalang Dionisio na Areopago na naging Kristyano matapos marinig ang pangangaral ni San Pablo (Mga Gawâ 17:32–34). Mababakás din ang tunggalian sa pagitan ng Kristyanidad at mga Helenistang pilosopiya sa mga akdâ ng mga Ama ng Simbahan gaya nila San Clemente ng Alexandria, San Juan Crisostomo at San Gregorio Nasyanseno.<sup>9</sup> Mayroong gaya ni Tertulliano na tutol sa pilosopiya ngunit mayroon namang tulad ni San Clemente na nakikita ang pakinabang dito. Sa mga Ama ng Simbahan, marahil walâ nang hihigit pa sa mga nagawâ ni San Agustin pagdating sa pagsusulong ng ugnayan ng Kristyanidad at pilosopiya. Sa katunayan, kay San Agustin mismo matatagpûan ang pagtatampok sa Kristyanidad bílang pilosopiya.<sup>10</sup> Mababása rin ang ganitong pagpupursige sa mga naging tagasunod ni San Agustin sa edad medya gaya ni San Anselmo<sup>11</sup> at San Buenaventura.<sup>12</sup> Sa inspirasyon ni San Agustin, kapwà naniniwalà sina San Anselmo at San Buenaventura na kasama sa pagiging pilosopiya ng pilosopiya ang pagpapalalim ng pagunawâ sa pananampalatayâ; naninindigan din sila na ang pananampalatayâ ay mahalagang sangkap ng paghahanap ng kahulogan ng búhay na sa Diyos lámang matatagpûan. Ang ganitong tradisyon ng pagpapapahalaga at pagsasabúhay ng ugnayan ng pamimilosopiya at pananampalatayâ ang sininop, binalangkas at ipinaliwanag ni Santo Tomas sa kanyang akdâng *Summa Theologiae*. Para kay Santo Tomas, posibleng maging pilosopikal ang Kristyanidad sapagkat tulay sa Diyos ang katwiran; posible ring maging Kristyano ang pilosopiya sapagkat ang hantungan ng pilosopiya ay Diyos, ang karunungan na dakilâ at banal.<sup>13</sup>

Ang nabanggit sa katatapos na mga talatâ ang itinuturing ko na pinaiksî at pinasimpleng paglalagom sa ideya ni Etienne Gilson tungkol sa tanong na “mayroon bang Kristyanong pilosopiya?”<sup>14</sup> Magaspang man ang ginawâ kong paglalagom, sana, kahit paano, ay nahiwatigan ninyo ang

<sup>9</sup> Tingnan sa Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 35–37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 128–130.

<sup>12</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. by Dom Illtyd Trethowan, (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), 79–105.

<sup>13</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 16–21 at Etienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 7–16.

<sup>14</sup> Maliban sa mga akdâng nabanggit na sa mga naunang talâbabâ, ang ideya ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ay mas malawak na tinalakay sa Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy: The Gifford Lectures (1931–1932)*, trans. by A.H.C. Downes, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940) at Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy*, trans. by Armand Maurer, (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993).

panukalà ni Gilson na mayroon at totoo ang Kristyanong pilosopiya. Para sa mga hindî masyadong pamilyar sa kanyang pangalan, si Etienne Gilson ay isa sa mga iskolar na Franses na nagsulong ng naiibang pagbasa kay Santo Tomas katulad ng ginawâ ng kanyang kaibigang si Jacques Maritain, isa ring Franses na Tomistang intelektwal.<sup>15</sup> Gaya ni Maritain, si Gilson ay isang Tomistang laiko. Mahalagang bigyang diin ang kanilang pagiging laiko sapagkat maraming iskolar na Franses noong mga panahong iyon na dalubhasà sa kaisipan ni Santo Tomas ngunit pawàng mga parìng Dominiko gaya nina Antonin Sertillanges, Reginald Garrigou-Langrange, Yves Congar at Marie Dominique-Chenu. Importante ring sabihin na bawat isa sa mga pangalang nabanggit ay pinag-aralan si Santo Tomas mulà sa punto de vista ng teyolohiya. Kaiba sa kanila ang dulog ni Gilson at Maritain na gáling sa perspektibo ng pilosopiya. Magkasundô si Gilson at Maritain sa pagtutok sa pilosopiya ni Santo Tomas ngunit hindî sila pareho pagdating sa paraan ng pilosopikal na pagbasa. Kung lente ni Gilson ang kasaysayan sa pagaaral kay Santo Tomas, epistemolohiya naman ang para kay Maritain.<sup>16</sup> Magkaiba rin ang karanasang relihiyoso ng dalawa. Si Gilson ay Katoliko mulà pagkabatà samantalang si Maritain ay naging Katoliko lámang, kasama ng kanyang kabiyak na si Raïssa,<sup>17</sup> noong may sapat na gulang na sa tulong ng mga kaibigan gaya ng batikang nobelistang Franses na si Leon Bloy at isa pang Franses na manunulat na si Charles Peguy. Si Peguy ang umenganyo sa magkaparehang Jacques at Raïssa na makinig sa mga panayam ni Henri Bergson. Walâng kamalày-malày ang magkabiya na Maritain noon na si

<sup>15</sup> Tingnan sa Gerald A. McCool, "Twentieth-Century Scholasticism," in *The Journal of Religion*, 58, "Supplement. Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure" (1978), 198–221.

<sup>16</sup> Hindî nangangahulogan na limitado sa epistemolohiya ang isinulat ni Maritain. Sa katunayan, sakop din ng pagaaral niya ang etika, metapisika, estetika at politika. Ang partikular na pagtukoy sa epistemolohiya ay pagkilala lámang sa pilosopikal na karakter ng ilan sa kanyang pinakamahahalagang akdâ, pati na rin ng kanyang posisyon tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Tingnan sa Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, (London: The Centenary Press, 1937); Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. by Mabelle L. Andison, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955); Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1952), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/range.htm>>; at Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. by Edward Flannery, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1955), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/aeocp00.htm>>.

<sup>17</sup> Bagaman hindî kasing tanyag ng asawang si Jacques, si Raïssa Maritain ay isa ring establisadong makatà at iskolar. Sa katunayan, kabilang siya sa mangilan-ngilang babaeng nagsulat tungkol kay Santo Tomas sa bungad ng ikadalawampûng siglo. Tingnan sa Raïssa Maritain, *The Angel of the Schools*, trans. by Julie Kernan, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1942), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/sta.htm>>.

Bergson ang magiging susi sa pagbaling nila sa Katolisismo at sa pilosopiya ni Santo Tomas.<sup>18</sup>

Si Bergson ay may positibo ring inpluwensya sa pamimilosopiya ni Gilson ngunit batid niya ang limitasyon ni Bergson pagdating sa relihiyon. Malaking tulong si Bergson sa pagpapalinaw ng kanyang mga konsepto at ideya ngunit tila nakukulangan si Gilson kay Bergson kapag pinagusapan na ang mga karanasan o katotohanang may aspektong teyolohikal.<sup>19</sup> Nabanggit kanina na di gaya ni Maritain, si Gilson ay ipinanganak na Katoliko at nagpamalas ng kanyang pagiging Katoliko sa kanyang mga akdâ. Gayunman, sa simulâ, hindi agad ang Katolikong medyebal na si Santo Tomas ang pumukaw ng kanyang akademikong interes kundî ang modernong Katoliko na si Descartes; hindi rin sa mga Katolikong institusyon umusbong ang kanyang dedikasyon sa Tomismo kundî sa mga sekular na eskwelahan gaya ng Sorbonne at College de France; hindi rin mga relihiyosong iskolar ang nagbukâs ng pintô sa kanya para makilala si Santo Tomas kundî ang anthopolohista-sosyolohista na si Lucien Levy-Bruhl at ang pilosoper nga na si Henri Bergson. Kay Levy-Bruhl nanggáling ang mungkahi na pag-aralan ni Gilson para sa kanyang tesis ang inpluwensya ng iskolastisismo sa mga ideya ni Descartes. Sa panahong nag-aaral si Gilson sa Sorbonne, laganap ang paniniwalâ na ang modernidad lámang ang tanging tagapagmana ng pilosopiya ng mga sinaunang Griyego. Pansamantala raw itong natabunan ng pamamayanî ng teyolohiya sa panahong medyebal na siya ring dahilan ng paglabnaw ng pilosopiya dahil sa iskolastisismo. Bagaman may ambag ang mga sosyolohistang Franses na sina Augusto Comte at Emile Durkheim sa ganitong pagmamaliit sa relihiyon, teyolohiya at iskolastisismo, si Rene Descartes ang kinikilalang ugat ng nasabing pananaw. Ipinakilala ni Descartes ang kanyang sarili at ang urî ng pamimilosopiya na kinakatawan niya sa pamamagitan ng pagtalikod sa iskolastisismo at mulîng pagtatatag ng pilosopiya, hindi na sa mohon ng relihiyon, kundî sa isang mas sigurado raw na pundasyon. Ang modernidad, samakatuwid, sa kumpas ni Descartes, ay naging hudyat sa pagpapawalâng-bisâ ng ugnayan ng relihiyon at pilosopiya at sa pagtatanyag ng pagiisip

---

<sup>18</sup> Para sa bayograpiya ni Jacques Maritain, tingnan sa Ralph McInerny, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain: A Spiritual Life* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), <[https://maritain.nd.edu/assets/570350/mcinerney\\_the\\_very\\_rich\\_hours\\_of\\_jacques\\_maritain.pdf](https://maritain.nd.edu/assets/570350/mcinerney_the_very_rich_hours_of_jacques_maritain.pdf)>.

<sup>19</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. by Cecile Gilson, (New York: Random House, 1962), 106–131. Para makita ang husay ni Gilson sa pagtutok sa konsepto at klarong pagpapalawak nito, tingnan sa Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952).

bílang solitaryong gawâ ng tao; ang tao, sa tingin ni Descartes ay hindi lámang suheto kundí isang cogito. Ito ang diwà ng panahong moderno.<sup>20</sup>

Sinundan ni Gilson si Descartes, sa katunayan, binabasa na niya ito bago pa siya pormal na mag-aral ng pilosopiya.<sup>21</sup> Ang problema, habang masusi niyang pinagaaralan at masinsinang sinusuyod ang kanyang mga ideya, mas lalòng lumilinaw kay Gilson na malí si Descartes; na hindi totoong nilampasan ng pilosopiya ang edad medya at basta na lámang tumalon mulâ sa panahon ng mga Griyego papuntang modernidad; na hindi totoong isinantabi ng teyolohiya ang pilosopiya sa panahong namamayanì ang iskolastisismo; na hindi totoong waláng mapupulot na pilosopiya sa mga akdâ ng mga kinikilalang kanon ng medyebal na kaisipan gaya nina San Agustin, Boethius, San Anselmo, San Buenaventura at Santo Tomas de Aquino. Ang nalikom ni Gilson mulâ sa kanyang pagtunton sa kaisipang medyebal ang siyang naging punlâ ng panukalâ niya tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Matapos basahin ang mga akdâ ng mismong mga intelektuwal at iskolar ng edad medya, noon niya napatunayan ang kakulangan ni Rene Descartes pati na ang kasinungalingan ng mga promotor ng modernidad na nagsasabing namatay ang pilosopiya sa medyebal na panahon at tangìng modernidad ang nagbigay ng bagong-búhay dito. Ang aksidenteng engkwentrong ito sa pilosopiyang medyebal ang nagudyok kay Gilson na isulat ang isa sa kanyang pinakamahalagang akdâ, ang *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, ang isinalibrong panayam niya noong 1931–32 sa bantog na Gifford Lectures. Sa nasabing isina-aklat na panayam, inilahad ni Gilson ang kanyang mas solido at mas konkretong argumento para sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Ang nasabing argumento rin ang babalangkas at magpapatibay sa naiibang pagbasa ni Gilson kay Santo Tomas, dahilan kung bakit, para kay Gilson, katulad ng itinuturò ni Papa Leo XIII sa *Aeterni Patris*, si Santo Tomas ang modelo ng Kristyanong pilosopiya. Batid ni Gilson na hindi magugustuhan at mariing tututulan ng mga modernista ang kanyang posisyon. Sa katunayan, handâ siya rito. Ang hindi niya marahil inaasahan ay ang pagtangi sa kanyang ideya ng kapwà niya mga Katolikong intelektwal, partikular na ang mga Franses na Tomistang iskolar. Ito ang klimang nagluwal sa tinaguriang debate ng dekada trenta sa Fransya tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Sa debateng ito umalingawngaw at nagmarka ang pangalan ni Etienne Gilson.

<sup>20</sup> Mababása ang tayâ ni Gilson sa modernidad sa Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950) at Etienne Gilson, & Thomas Langan, *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, (New York: Random House, 1963).

<sup>21</sup> Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 12–14; Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, 7–18.

## Si Gilson at Tomismo sa Fransya

Sa katatapos na bahagi, bahagya kong inilahad ang ideya ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ni Gilson kasabay ng pahapyaw na paglalarawan ng kanyang intelektwal na bayograpiya pati na rin ng intelektwal na kultura ng Fransya. Layunin ng nasabing pagtalakay na maipakilala muna si Gilson at ang pilosopikal na kontekstong kanyang ginalawan lalo na sa mga hindi pa masyadong pamilyar sa kanya o sa kanyang mga akda. Sa bahaging ito, ilalahad ko naman ang mga mayor na puntos ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ayon kay Gilson kasabay ng paghahayag ng mga ideyang sangayon at disangayon dito mula sa mga kapwa niya Katoliko at Tomistang intelektwal. Nilimitahan ko ang presentasyon ng debate kay Gilson at sa mga kapwa niya Katoliko at Tomista hindi lamang dahil kulang ang oras at espasyo kundî para na rin mabigyan ng mas masinop na diskusyon ang presensya ni Santo Tomas at Tomismo sa kulturang intelektwal ng Fransya. Hindi naman sana mawalan ng gana dahil sa limitasyong ito ang mga naghahangad ng mas komprehensibong presentasyon ng debate ng dekada trenta. Kung tutuosin, marami nang nakalathala at online na materyal tungkol sa nasabing debate; madali nang ma-akses ang mga ito ng mga naghahangad ng mas kompleto at mas malawak na talâ nito.<sup>22</sup> Sa ngayon, nakatutok ang aking pokus kay Gilson at sa kasunduan-tunggalian sa pagitan niya at mga kapwa iskolar na Tomista at Katoliko.

Nabanggit sa simulâ na isa sa dahilan na nagbigay daan sa debate ng dekada trenta ay ang ensiklikal ni Papa Leo XIII na *Aeterni Patris*. Sa nasabing ensiklikal, maliban sa pagtukoy sa kalabisan ng modernidad, ikinampanya din ng Papa ang pagbalik kay Santo Tomas bilang gabay sa pagtugon ng simbahang Katoliko sa hamon ng modernong panahon. Mahalagang sabihin na ang pagpapalabas ng *Aeterni Patris* ay napapanahong hakbang tungo sa pagsinop at pagpapatatag ng Katolikong intelektwal na tradisyon. Bago pa ipinahayag ang *Aeterni Patris*, marami na ang intelektwal na Katoliko at marami na ring Katoliko ang intelektwal. Halimbawa, ang mga modernong Franses na pilosoper gaya ni Rene Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche at Blaise Pascal ay pawang mga Katoliko ngunit malaking tanong kung maibibilang ba silang lahat sa hulma ng tinawag ni Papa Leo XIII na “Kristyanong pilosopiya.”<sup>23</sup> Tila hindi sapat na ang isang iskolar ay “Katoliko” lang sa

<sup>22</sup> Tingnan sa Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 8–10. Maliban sa mga babasahin at lathalaing na matatagpuan sa libro ni Sadler, may mga materyal ding nakalista na makikita sa Gregory Sadler, “Christian Philosophy: The 1930s French Debates,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://iep.utm.edu/christian-philosophy-1930s-french-debate/>>.

<sup>23</sup> Mahalagang sabihin na ang terminong “Kristyanong pilosopiya” ay hindi matatagpuan sa mismong dokumento bagaman, gaya ng nabanggit na, makikita ito sa sub-titulo ng salin sa Ingles. Ayon kay James Weisheipl, O.P., nauna pang ginamit ng mga Katolikong iskolar na Franses ang salitang “Kristyanong pilosopiya” bago pa lumabas ang *Aeterni Patris*.



tawag para masabi na ang kanyang akdâ ay produkto nga ng Kristyanong pamimilosopiya. Ang *Aeterni Patris* ang nagtakdâ ng pamantayan sa paghusga sa bagay na ito. Ang pamantayang ito ay walâng iba kundî ang “ugnayan ng katwiran at pananampalatayâ.” Hindî ito simpleng ugnayan sapagkat nakapaloob ang nasabing relasyon sa isang pseudo-hiyerkiya at magkatuwang na paggalang sa kani-kaniyang awtonomiya. May sariling dominyon ang katwiran, ganoon din ang pananampalatayâ ngunit hindî nangangahulogan na hindî sila pwedeng magtagpô. Posible silang magtagpô sa mga usapin na may kinalaman sa natural na búhay ng tao. Ngunit pagdating sa usaping supernatural, nagpapaubayâ ang katwiran sapagkat lampas na sa sakop ng kanyang mandato ang nilalaman ng Banal na Kasulatan. Maaaring tumulong ang katwiran sa pagpapalinaw ng pagunawâ sa pananampalatayâ ngunit mayroon itong limitasyon sa ilang paksâ na saklaw lámang ng pananampalatayâ. Ang pilosopiya ay may saklaw din na hindî panghihimasokan ng pananampalatayâ liban kung masangkot dito ang mga tanong tungkol sa moralidad o kaligtasan ng tao. Pananampalatayâ, samakatuwid, ang nagsasaad ng limitasyon ng katwiran; katwiran naman ang nagpapalawak ng pangunawâ sa pananampalatayâ. Ang kaisipan na nagpapamalas ng ganitong uri ng ugnayan ay halimbawâ ng Kristyanong pilosopiya. Hindî ito samakatuwid isang sistema kundî isang paraan ng pamimilosopiya.

Sa mga naunang Katolikong intelektwal, pinili ni Papa Leo XIII si Santo Tomas bílang modelo ng Kristyanong pilosopiya dahil malinaw nitong naipakita sa kanyang mga isinulat, lalò na sa *Summa Theologiae*, ang organiko at dinamikong tambalan ng katwiran at pananampalatayâ. Malaking inpluwensya sa desisyon ng Papa ang panawagan ng kanyang sinundan sa katungkulan, si Papa Pio IX<sup>24</sup> at ang mga isinulat ng mga gaya ng Italyanong Cajetano Sanseverino, ang Alemang Jose Kleutgen at mga Kastilâng Juan Jose Urraburu, Jaime Balmes at Zeferino Gonzalez na pare-parehong nagsusulong ng pagbabalik-tanaw sa iskolestikong tradisyon ng edad medya at sa mas malinaw pang pagdidiin sa ugnayan ng katwiran at pananampalatayâ na pinawalâng-bisâ ng modernong pilosopiya.<sup>25</sup> Nabanggit kanina ang naging papel ni Descartes sa pagpapawalâng-bisâng ito ngunit pagdating ng ikalabingsiyam at ikadalawampung siglo, hindî na si Descartes lámang ang problema. Pumasok na rin sa eksena ang inpluwensya ng mga Alemang

---

Tingnan sa James Weisheipl, O.P., “Commentary,” in Victor B. Brezik, C.S.B., *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981), 24.

<sup>24</sup> Tingnan sa Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus* (Vatican, 1846), in *Papal Encyclicals Online* <<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quiplu.htm>>.

<sup>25</sup> Tingnan sa Joseph Louis Perrier, *The Revival of Scholastic Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1909), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/perrier.html>>.

pilosoper gaya nila Immanuel Kant, GWF Hegel at Martin Heidegger at ng mga Franses na intelektwal tulad nila Augusto Comte, Emile Durkheim at Henri Bergson. Sa kasamâang palad, sila, at hindi si Santo Tomas o si San Agustin, ang kinahuhumalingan ng mundo ng pilosopiya noong mga panahong iyon.<sup>26</sup>

Ganito ang sitwasyong dinatnan ni Gilson nang pumasok siya eksena ng debate noong dekada trenta. Gaya ng nabanggit kanina, aksidenteng nadiskubre ni Gilson ang Kristyanong pilosopiya habang pinagaaralan ang kaisipang moderno ni Descartes. Umasa siya sa simulâ na higit na maintindihan ang pilosopiyang Cartesyano ngunit humantong siya bandang hulí sa pagkadiskubre sa pilosopiyang Kristyano. Ang nadiskubre niyang mga kaalaman sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ang kanyang isinulat at inilathala sa mga aklat patungkol kay San Agustin, San Buenaventura, Duns Scotus at si Santo Tomas de Aquino.<sup>27</sup> Ang mismong paninindigan niya tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ay natitipon naman sa akdâng una nang nabanggit, ang *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* at iba pang kaugnay na pagaaral gaya ng *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, *Christian Philosophy* at *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Sa bahaging ito, nais kong i-presenta ang isang paglalagom ng ideya ni Gilson tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Bilang gabay para sa mas malinaw na paglalahad, kinategorya ko ang paglalagom sa tatlo: *historikal*, *pilosopikal* at *etiko-teyolohikal*. Gayunman, pinapaalalahanan ang mambabasa na ang galíng at bisà ng ideya ni Gilson ay higit pa sa paglalagom na ito. Walang paglalagom ng kahit sinong mananaliksik o manunulat ang papantay sa orihinal na tinig ng isang awtor na hindi natin mararanasan liban sa kanyang mismong mga libro. Mas mainam pa ring basahin ang mga ito kung nais na maunawaan ang kaisipan ni Gilson.

Narito ang isang paglalagom ng mga argumento ni Gilson hinggil sa Kristyanong pilosopiya.

Una, ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay nakapaloob sa kasaysayan. Ito ang buod ng naturang paglalagom na *historikal*. Hindi lámang ito nakapaloob sa kasaysayan ng pilosopiya; sangkot din ito sa kasaysayan ng Silanganin at Kanluraning sibilisasyon. Ang sinasabing paglaktaw ng pilosopiya sa edad medya at ang mulí raw paglitaw nito sa modernidad ay posible lámang kung itatanggi natin na ang panahong medyebal ay isang historikal na pangyayari, pati na rin ang pag-angkop nito ng mga antigong kaisipan hanggang sa magbukás ang panahong moderna. Isang tuloy-tuloy na paggalaw ang

<sup>26</sup> Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, 20–41.

<sup>27</sup> Nabanggit na ang mga akdâng isinulat ni Gilson tungkol kay San Agustin, San Buenaventura at Santo Tomas. Tungkol naman kay Duns Scotus, tingnan sa Etienne Gilson, *John Duns Scotus: Introduction to His Fundamental Positions*, trans. by James Colbert (New York: T&T Clark, 2018).

kasaysayan. Hindi ito binubuô ng mga de-kahong pangyayari na pwedeng pamilyan kung ano lámang ang gusto nating sundan. Umuusad ang kasaysayan gaya ng isang batis at sa daloy na ito, maraming tagpúan at hiwalayang nagaganap upang makabuô ng mga bagong simulâ. Ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay isa sa mga simulâng nabuô sa pamamagitan ng tagpúan at hiwalayan ng iba't ibang kalinangan. Sa loob mismo ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ay may nagaganap rin na tagpúan at hiwalayan – ang tagpúan at hiwalayan ng pananamapalatayà at katwiran na nakapaloob din sa kilos ng kasaysayan. Sapagkat ang pananamapalatayà at katwiran ay kapwà may karakter na historikal, marapat lámang na maging dinamiko rin ang kanilang tambalan. Ang kampanya ni Papa Leo XIII sa *Aeterni Patris* ay nakabatay sa pagtanggap sa pangangailangan ng Kristyanong pilosopiya na makibagay sa kumpas ng kasaysayan. Pinili niya si Santo Tomas na modelo sapagkat sa kanyang mga akdâ, partikular ang *Summa Theologiae*, pinatunayan nito na posible ang isang sintetikong paglalahad ng Kristyanong pananamapalatayà sa kabilâ ng mga tagpúan at hiwalayang nakapaligid sa kanya noong panahong medyebal.

Pangalawa, ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay tunay na *pilosopikal* sa kabilâ ng pagkakasangkot nito sa Kristyanidad. Ang ugnayan ng pilosopiya at relihiyon gaya ng Kristyanidad ay hindi hadlang sa pagiging pilosopikal ng pilosopiya. Makikita natin ang katibayan nito, hindi lámang sa Gresya kundî pati na rin sa mga kulturang Silanganin kung saan ang relihiyon at pilosopiya ay matalik na magkasaniib at halos imposibleng paghiwalayin. Ang paghihiwalay samakatuwid ng relihiyon at pilosopiya ay imbensyon hindi lámang ng Kanluraning pilosopiya kundî ng modernidad mismo. Para kay Gilson, ang ugnayan ng pananamapalatayà at katwiran na makikita sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ay pagkilala at pagpapatuloy lámang ng tradisyong likas na sa kanilang dalawa sa simulâ pa. Ang pagtatampok ng ganitong ugnayan gaya ng mababása kay Santo Tomas ay hindi bago kundî pagpapanariwà ng ugnayan ng pilosopiya at pananamapalatayà. Sa pamamagitan ng nasabing ugnayan, maraming mga konsepto, bukabularyo, teyorya at mga kahulogan ang nabuô, nabago at nabigyan ng linaw at naging bahagi ng relihiyoso at sekular na kamalayan. Halimbawà, malaking bahagi ng mga doktrinang binalangkas ng mga Ama ng Simbahan ay hangò sa mga konsepto ng mga Griyego ngunit sa paggamit nito, nagkaroon din ng transpormasyon ang nasabing mga konsepto na naging daan sa pagpapalawig at pagpapayaman ng kanilang kahulogan. Ganito rin ang masasabi sa panghihiram ni Santo Tomas ng mga ideya ni Aristoteles. Totoo na may konseptwal na utang ni Santo Tomas kay Aristoteles ngunit hindi rin naman maitatangi ang pakinabang ng pilosopiya ni Aristoteles nang kinatuwang ito ni Santo Tomas sa pagpapaliwanag ng Kristyanong pananamapalatayà. Mainam bigyang-diin ang salitang kababanggit lámang:

“katuwang” o *ancilla* sa Latin. Malinaw kay Gilson, gaya ni Santo Tomas, na ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay hindi sistema kundî paraan ng pamimilosopiya. At ang pamimilosopiyang ito ay nagsisilbing katuwang upang pagyamanin ang pagunawà sa at praktika ng pananampalatayà.

Pangatlo, ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay kwalipikado na maging pilosopiya kahit na ang batayan at tunguhin nito ay teyolohikal. Kaiba sa rasyonalismo na ang sandigan ay ang sariling kognitibong kakayanan ng tao, nakabatay ang Kristyanong pilosopiya sa pahayag ng Diyos at kung paano ito dinadanas sa búhay ng mga mananampalatayâ. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit ang isang aspekto ng Kristyanong pilosopiya para kay Gilson ay inilalarawan ko na *etiko-teyolohikal*. Ibig sabihin, isang urî ito ng pamimilosopiya na hangò at patungkol sa búhay-pananampalatayà ng mga Kristyano. Ang pangaral ni San Pablo sa mga Epikuryano at Estoico na dinatnan niya sa Athena ay isang demonstrasyon kung ano at para saan ang “Kristyanong pilosopiya.” Umasa marahil si San Pablo na mauunawàan siya ng kanyang mga kausap sapagkat gaya ng kanilang pilosopiya, ang Kristyanidad ay may pagpapahalaga rin sa praktika o pamumuhay na matuwid at marapat. Hindi ideya ang layon nito kundî kagalíngan ng kaluluwa katulad din ng itinuturò nila. Ngunit sa halip na *philia*, *agape* ang daan ng Kristyanidad patungòng *sophia*. Higit sa karunungan ng diwà, ang *agape* ay nagbibigay ng kahulogan ng búhay sa pamamagitan ng pakikipagkapwà. Ang isa pang pagkakaiba ng Kristyanidad sa iba nitong katapat ay ang bawás nitong pagdakilà sa katwiran. Hindi nito sinasabi na masamá o hindi kailangan ang katwiran. Ibig sabihin lámang nito na, katulad ng nabanggit na, tinitingnan ng Kristyanidad ang katwiran hindi bílang solitaryong kakayanan kundî bílang katuwang ng pananampalatayà. Hangad ng katwiran ang *paliwanag*; hanap naman ng pananampalatayà ang mismong *liwanag*. Sa kanilang dalawa, may mas mabigat na tungkulin ang pananampalatayà na manguna sapagkat ang paghahanap ng paliwanag na walâng tanglaw ay tila pagdungaw sa bintanà na walâng tinatanaw. May iba namang Kristyano na pananampalatayà lámang ang tangìng sinusundan. Sila ang halimbawà ng mga taong nakalimot na sinomang tumitig nang diretso sa araw ay siguradong masisilaw at lalòng magdidilim ang paningin sa halip na maliwanagan. Kailangan ng katwiran at pananampalatayà ang isa’t isa. Ang balanseng ugnayan nila ang batayan ng Kristyanong pilosopiya.

Mahigit-kumulang, kinakatawan ng katatapos na mga talatà ang buod ng ideya ni Gilson tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. At gaya ng nabanggit, sa pagsalang niya sa aktwal na debate ng dekada trenta, ang ganitong ideya ay masasabing hinog na sa kanyang isip at handâ na niyang panindigan. Sa unang tingin, malinaw na makikita ang pagtatangi ni Gilson kay Santo Tomas at ang kanyang pagpanig sa turing ni Papa Leo XIII sa

Dominikong santo bílang modelo ng Kristyanong pilosopiya. Aakalàin marahil ng iba na ikatutuwâ ng mga kapwà Tomista ang hakbang ni Gilson na isulong ang pangalan ni Santo Tomas kontra sa modernidad. Taliwas sa inaasahan, kabaligtaran ang nangyari. Sa katunayan, bago pa ang debate, tatlong kritiko na (dalawa sa kanila ay Dominiko) ang nagsabi sa kanya na tila malí ang direksyon ng kanyang pananaliksik. Ang unang kritiko (na hindí pinangalanan ni Gilson) ay isang teyologo mulâ sa Toulouse at nagsabi sa kanya na imposibleng maging modelo ng Kristyanong pilosopiya si Santo Tomas sapagkat walâ itong sariling pilosopiya. Ang tangìng pilosopiya raw na mababasa sa kanyang mga akdâ ay ang pilosopiya na makikita rin sa kahit kaninong iskolar noong edad medya. Hindí samakatuwid makatwiran ikabit sa kanyang pangalan ang isang bagay na makikita rin naman sa iba. Ang pangalawang kritiko ni Gilson ay ang Dominikong teyologo na si Pierre Mandonnet na may opinyong kontra sa unang kritiko at sa posisyon ni Gilson. Para kay Mandonnet, walâng Kristyanong pilosopiya sa edad medya sapagkat tangìng kay Santo Tomas lang ito matatagpuan. Isa lámang daw pangalan ang maitatabi sa pilosopiya at ito ay ang pangalan ng santong Dominiko. Sa timbangan ni Mandonnet, ang mga akdâ ni San Buenaventura (na ginawan din ng libro ni Gilson) ay hindí karapat-dapat sa tawag na Kristyanong pilosopiya. Ang pangatlong kritiko at isa ring Dominiko ay si Gabriel Thery na tahasang tinutulan ang panukalà ni Gilson alinman kay Santo Tomas o sa edad medya tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya. Para kay Thery, walâng kahulogan ang terminong “Kristyanong pilosopiya” sapagkat unang-una, ang mga akdâ ni Santo Tomas o kahit sino pang iskolatikong intelektwal ay pawàng pagaaral lámang sa teyolohiya. Sa madalîng salitâ, para kay Thery, at tulad ng sinasabi ng marami, walâng pilosopiya, Kristyano man o hindí, sa edad medya.<sup>28</sup>

Sa pagsali niya sa mismong debate, noong 1931, higit na maraming pasubali ang sasalubong sa panukalà ni Gilson. Katulad ng inaaasahan, may pagtutol sa kampo ng mga modernista. Ang malaking sopresa marahil ay ang iba-iba at mas komplikadong tugon gáling mismo sa mga kapwà niya Katoliko at Tomistang kalahok sa debate. Sapat na marahil sabihin na kung hangad ng *Aeterni Patris* na pag-isahin at palakasin ang Kristyanong pilosopiya sa pamamagitan ni Santo Tomas, ipinakita ng debate ng dekada trenta na mahirap itong mangyari at kung mangyari man, mahabàng panahon at paguusap ang kailangan. Sa mga Katolikong Tomista na sumali, tila si Jacques Maritain lámang ang nagpakita ng pagsangayon at pagkilala sa proyekto ni Gilson sa kabilâ ng pag-amin nito ng pagkakaiba nila sa metodo.<sup>29</sup> May ibang Katoliko ngunit hindí Tomista gaya nila Gabriel

<sup>28</sup> Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, 87–105.

<sup>29</sup> Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 64–67.

Marcel<sup>30</sup> at Maurice Blondel<sup>31</sup> na may iba ring pananaw. Para sa dalawa, posibleng magkaroon ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ngunit hindi nila nakikitang may anyô o hubog ito na kapareho ng pilosopiya ni Santo Tomas. Walâ ring iisang timbre ang tugon ng mga Dominiko at iba pang Tomista. Kinikilala nila na may talâbang nangyari sa pagitan ng Kristyanidad at pilosopiya ngunit hindi sila kombinsido na sapat itong batayan para sabihin na naging Kristyano ang pilosopiya dahil lámang sa talâbang ito. At kung sakali ngang ganito ang kinahinatnan, ibig sabihin, naging Kristiyano ang pilosopiya, ano ang kasiguruhan na pilosopiya pa rin ito at hindi teyolohiya (Van Steenberghen).<sup>32</sup> May mga alinlangan din sa metodo at sakop ng Kristyanong pilosopiya. Halimbawà, nagiging Kristiyano ba agad ang pilosopiya dahil lámang Kristyano ang namilosopiya? Agad bang maililipat ang katangian ng kanyang personal at partikular na desisyon na mamilosopiya sa pangkalahatang karakter ng Kristiyang intelektwal na tradisyon? (Mandonnet)<sup>33</sup> May nagtatanong din kung bakit mas matimbang ang pansin na ibinibigay sa edad medya gayung ang edad medya ay bunga lámang ng antigong panahon? Kung gáling sa kasaysayan ang Kristyanong pilosopiya, bakit tila kulang ang paglalahad ng batayang historikal? (Sertillanges)<sup>34</sup>

Ang debate tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya noong dekada trenta ay bahagi lámang ng mas malawak na tensyon sa pagitan ng mga Tomista. Sa labas ng debate, ibang paksâ naman ang kaharap ng ibang Tomistang iskolar. Halimbawà, nariyan ang mga naniniwalang ang pilosopiya ni Santo Tomas ay mailalapit sa epistemolohiya ni Kant, ibig sabihin, may pilosopiya si Santo Tomas ngunit hindi medyebal kundî modernong kaisipan ang batayan. Ito ang kampo ng mga Neo-tomista na kinabibilangan ng mga gaya nila Cardinal Mercier at Jose Marechal. Sa kabilang panig naman, may mga Tomistang mas pabor na panatilihin ang klasikong karakter ng Tomistikong kaisipan kontra sa modernong tradisyon. Sila ang mga neo-iskolatiko na kinakatawan ng mga gaya nila Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Antonin Sertillanges at Eduoard Hugon, ang Dominikong Tomista na responsable sa bukam-bibig noon na 24 na tesis ni Santo Tomas. Mayroon ding iba na nais basahin ang intelektwal na pamana ni Santo Tomas sa kuntekstong historikal ngunit hindi bílang pilosopiya (gaya ng ginagawâ ni Gilson) kundî bílang

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–80.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 141–157.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 81–83.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–88. Mahalaga ring ipaalala na ang mga nabanggit ay mga representatibong komento lámang at limitado sa nosyon ng Kristyanong pilosopiya ni Gilson. Higit na marami ang mga posisyon at oposisyon ng iba't ibang Dominiko at Tomistang iskolar sa kahabâan ng debate na nagsimulâ noong dekada trenta at nagsanga pa sa dekada sitenta hanggang sa kasalukuyan.

isang teyolohikal na disiplina na bukás sa modernong inpluwensya. Ang mga iskolar katulad ni Yves Congar at Marie-Dominique Chenu ay kasali sa hanay na ito.<sup>35</sup>

Posibleng akalain na walang naresolba ang nasabing debate sa kabilâ ng panahong iginugol dito (na lumampas pa ng dekada trenta). Kung ito ang pagbabatayan, parang bigô ang *Aeterni Patris* na makamit ang layunin na pag-isahin ang mga Katolikong intelektwal sa likod ni Santo Tomas laban sa modernidad. Bagaman may punto ang ganitong kritika, hindi sapat na gawing sukatan ito ng tagumpay ng nasabing debate o ng *Aeterni Patris* mismo. Totoo na maraming may alinlangan sa panukalâ ni Gilson tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ngunit hindi nangangahulogan na bigô ito. Ang bilang ng isinulat na akdâ ni Gilson pati na rin ang dami ng mga sumunod at tumugon sa kanya, pabor man o hindi, ay katibayan mismo ng sinasabi ni Gilson na totoong may Kristyanong pilosopiya sapagkat nasaksihan at nasasaksihan ang patuloy nitong ebolusyon. Posibleng hindi pa ito lubusang nagaganap sapagkat ang lubos na kaganapan nito ay kailangan pang pagsikapan ng mga iskolar na nagsusulong ng pagpapanariwâ ng Tomismo. Ang proyekto ni Gilson ay isang malaking hakbang tungò sa sinasabi ni Aimé Forest na tuloy-tuloy na paghahanap ng tagpûan sa pagitan ng katwiran at pananampalatayâ na nangyayari sa loob mismo ng pamimilosopiya sa Fransya.<sup>36</sup> Malaking hámon ito sa mga Tomistang nagnanais panatilihing napapanahon si Santo Tomas. Sa ganitong pagtingin, hindi masasabing bigô si Gilson o ang *Aeterni Patris*. Ang kawalan ng iisang boses ng Tomismo at mga Tomista ay hindi kahinaan o kakulangan. Katibayan ito ng dinamismong patuloy na pumupukaw sa interes ng mga iskolar na naghahangad na higit pang mapagaralan si Santo Tomas. Hindi rin naman kapintasan ni Gilson at Kristyanong pilosopiya kung humarap ito sa maraming pagaalinlangan. Sapagkat kung tutuosin, kung ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ay tunay ngang pilosopikal, marapat lámang na sumalang ito sa masusing kritika na siyang kailangan ng anomang uri ng pilosopiya.

---

<sup>35</sup> Marami nang naisulat tungkol sa iba't ibang grupo ng mga Tomista. Makikita ang halimbawâ nito sa Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search of a Unitary Method*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989); Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2003); Roman Cessario, O.P., *A Short History of Thomism*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003); at John F.X. Knasas, *Being & Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 89.

## Mga Aral para sa Pamimilosopiyang Filipino

Ang Fransya ang isa sa mga lokasyon na kakikitaan ng masigla at konkretong pagtugon sa pagbalik kay Santo Tomas na pinanawagan ng *Aeterni Patris*. Katibayan nito ang maraming institusyon, mga kapisanan ng mga Tomista at medyebal na iskolar, mga journal, aklat at iba pang lathalaín, mga komperensya at akademikong pagtitipon na nagsulpotan at kumalat sa bansâ bílang tugon sa anunsyo ni Papa Leo XIII.<sup>37</sup> Dagdag pa rito ang pakikilahok ng mga primerong Franses na iskolar sa kampanyang ito. Ang mga pangalan ng ilan sa mga nasabing iskolar ay nabanggit na sa naunang bahagi nitong papel. Ibig sabihin, talagang limitado ang aking presentasyon at aakûin ko ang sisi kung may pangalan man o tema na dapat sana’y isinama ko pero hindi ko naisali. Maaaring sa isa pang panayam na gaya nito o sa isang papel mulâ sa sinomang interesado ay mabigyan ng puwang ang ibang iskolar, isyu o paksâ na hindi napabilang dito sa aking payak na sanaysay. Sa kabilâ nito, hindi maikakailâ ang halaga at epekto ng debate ng dekada trenta sa pagpapasigla ng Kristyanong pilosopiya bílang isang yugtô ng pilosopikal na tradisyon ng Fransya. Hindi rin matatawaran ang naging inpluwensya nito sa pagsusuri ng diskursong pilosopikal gamit ang relihiyon katulad ng ginawâ ni Santo Tomas sa kanyang panahon na sinikap namang tularan ni Etienne Gilson. Kahanay niya ang mga Katoliko at Tomistang Franses sa pagbuô ng isang intelektwal na kultura na kritikal kapwâ sa relihiyon at modernidad ngunit hindi sarado sa inpluwensya ng isa’t isa. Hindi lámang relihiyon at Tomismo ang nakinabang dito, kundî pati na rin ang pilosopiyang Franses sa pangkalahatan. Mahirap husgahan kung tagumpay nga o hindi ang nasabing debate, o kung tagumpay nga o hindi si Etienne Gilson. Kung tutuosin, mahirap talagang tukoyin kung paano nagtatagumpay pagdating sa pilosopiya. Mas matagumpay ba ang isang iskolar kung siguradong-sigurado ang kanyang sinasabi kaysa sa isa na hulogan ang pangungusap dahil naniniwalâ siyang ang tunay na mahalaga ay hindi mabibigkas nang minsan lámang?

At sa ganang atin, tayong mga Filipinong nag-aaral ng pilosopiya, hindi Franses, karamiha’y hindi Tomista, Kristiyano nga pero madalas ay parang hindi, anong aral ang posible nating mapulot dito?

Marapat pag-aralan at pag-usapan ng mga Tomasino ang pilosopiyang Franses hindi lámang dahil may birtwal na ugnayan sa pilosopiyang Franses ang departamaneto kundî dahil sadyang may historikal

---

<sup>37</sup> Hennesey, James, “Leo XIII’s Thomistic Revival: A Political and Philosophical Event,” in *The Journal of Religion*, 58 (1978), “Supplement. Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure,” 185–197.



at intelektwal na ugnayan ang Fransya sa pamimilosopiyang Filipino.<sup>38</sup> Noon pa’y nabanggit na ni Prop. Florentino Hornedo ang malaking ambag ng pilosopiyang Franses sa pagbuô ng intelektwal na tradisyon ng bansa.<sup>39</sup> Mababása rin ito sa mga akdâ nila Benedict Anderson<sup>40</sup> at Resil Mojares.<sup>41</sup> Sa katunayan, noong ikalabingsiyam na siglo, maliban sa bansag na *filibustero*, ginagamit din ng mga frayle ang salitang *volteriano* bilang bansag sa mga ilustradong naghahasik noon ng sinasabi nilang mga mapanganib na ideya mulâ sa Europa, partikular sa Fransya.<sup>42</sup> Ang tawag na *volteriano* ay hangò sa pangalan ni Voltaire, isang Franses na intelektwal at primerong kritiko ng relihiyon. Si Voltaire ay isa rin sa mahalagang inpluwensya sa politikal na kamalayan ni Rizal.<sup>43</sup> Bukod kay Rizal, nabahiran din ng inspirasyon ng mga Franses si Andres Bonifacio na sinasabing kinahiligan ang pagbabása ng kronika ng rebolusyong Franses pati na rin ang mga nobela ni Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*) at Eugene Sue (*The Wandering Jew*).<sup>44</sup>

Maliban sa kulturang intelektwal at pampanitikan, ang isa pang naguugnay sa Fransya at mga Filipino ay ang relihiyong Katoliko. Bago pa naging balwarte ng ateyismo ang Fransya at ang pilosopiya nito, matagal na matagal na panahon na ito ay saradong Katoliko. Sinomang nakabasa ng

---

<sup>38</sup> Ang papel na ito ay hango sa bersyong binasa ng may-akda sa simposyum sa UST na dinaos noong 15–16 Setyembre 2023. Sa orihinal na bersyon, ang talatang ito ay nagsimula nang ganito: “Sa yugtong ito, nais ko’ng kilalanin ang inisyatibo ni Gian Agbisit at Jessie Lino at ang pagtangkilik ng tagapamunò ng Departamento ng Pilosopiya, Dr. Marella A. Bolaños, para maidaos itong simposyum tungkol sa pilosopiyang Franses. Sa tantya ng dalawa (si Gian at Jessie), may sapat na dahilan para magkaroon ng ganitong klaseng simposyum lalò pa’t mahigit sa limampûng porsyento raw ng mga miyembro ng departamento ay nag-aaral o nagsasaliksik sa mga tema o pilosoper na may malapit na kaugnayan sa pilosopiyang Franses. Ilan sa mga miyembrong nabanggit ay kasama rito sa simposyum para magpresenta ng papel. May púnto si Gian at Jessie pero ang totoo, marapat ang ganitong simposyum hindi lámang dahil may birtwal na ugnayan sa pilosopiyang Franses ang departamaneto kundí dahil sadyang may historikal at intelektwal na ugnayan ang Fransya sa pamimilosopiyang Filipino.”

<sup>39</sup> Tingnan sa Florentino Hornedo, *Ideas and Ideals: Essays in Filipino Cognitive History* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Tingnan sa Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso Press, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Tingnan sa Resil B. Mojares, *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> Megan C. Thomas, *Orientalists, Propagandists and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism*, (Mandaluyong: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2016), x.

<sup>43</sup> Epifanio de los Santos, “Andres Bonifacio,” in *Revista Filipina*, 3:1 (January-February 1918), 37, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/philamer/acp0898.0003.001/50?page=root;size=150;view=image>> at John Nery, *Revolutionary Spirit: Jose Rizal in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011), 48.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 36; Patricio N. Abinales & Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005), 110.

mga talà tungkol sa krusada noong edad medya o nakabasa ng mga nobelang *Hunchback of Notre Dame* o kayâ *Three Musketeers* o kayâ nakabisita na sa katedral ng Notre Dame o Chartres ay makapagpapatunay sa naging mahabà, makulay at masalimuot na kasaysayan ng Katolisismo sa Fransya. Ngunit dumating din ang Fransya sa yugtô ng pagbitaw sa Katolisismo. Ang pagbitaw na ito ang siyang naging hudyat ng pagyakap ng mga Franses sa panahong moderno. Ang tinalakay na debate tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya noong dekada trenta ay nalalakipan ng komplikadong timpla ng kasaysayang ito. Para sa Fransya, ang modernidad ay hindî lámang pagbibihis ng bagong kaisipan; paghuhubad din ito ng lumàng saplot na kinakatawan ng relihiyong Katoliko. Ang mariing pagtutol ng mga modernista sa Kristyanong pilosopiya samakatuwid ay hindî lámang simpleng pagtanggì sa posibilidad na maging Kristiyano ang pilosopiya o maging pilosopikal ang Kristiyanidad; pagpapahayag din ito ng pangamba na mulîng sumigla ang Katolisismo sa bansâ at maantalà ang sekularisasyon na tinatahak ng Fransya.<sup>45</sup> Walâ man ang ganitong hermenyutika kay Etienne Gilson, hindî maiiwasang tingnan ang debate tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya sa ganitong pananaw.

Sa bisà ng mga kaugnayang ito, hindî man Tomista ang karamihan sa atin, malasado man ang ating pagiging Kristiyano, hindî man tayo nakapagsasalitâ ng Franses, sa tingin ko, may mapupulot tayong ilang bagay sa debate tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya na makatutulong sa pagpapayabong ng pamimilosopiyang Filipino. Sa totoo lang, marami tayong posibleng matutunan pero lilimatahan ko lámang sa tatlo ang aking listahan para mas madalîng matandàan.

Una, ang debate ng dekada trenta tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ay isang paaalala kung bakit hindî natin dapat pangilagan ang Tomismo o ang iskolastisismo o relihiyon sa ating pamimilosopiya. Sa tingin ko, ang pagsasantabi ng ibang lokal na iskolar sa Tomismo o iskolastisismo dahil lumà na raw o dahil may bahid daw ng relihiyon ay nagpapakita ng makitid na pag-unawà kapwà sa relihiyon at sa praktika ng diskurso. Tanggapin man natin o hindî, malaking bahagi ng búhay ng mga Filipino ang relihiyon, partikular ang Kristyanong relihiyon. Sa madalîng salitâ, mahirap sabihin na namimilosopiya tayo sa ngalan ng karaniwang tao kung isinasantabi naman natin ang isang karanasan tulad ng relihiyon na mahalaga sa kanila. Kaugnay nito, mahalagang makita natin ang kontemporaryong paglalapit ng pilosopiya at relihiyon gaya ng mababása sa mga akdâ ng mga tulad nina P.

---

<sup>45</sup> Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, 21–23.

Roque Ferriols,<sup>46</sup> Bro. Karl Gaspar,<sup>47</sup> P. Kenneth Masong,<sup>48</sup> at P. Raymun Festin.<sup>49</sup> Sila, gaya ni Gilson, ay naghahanap din ng paraan upang makapagnilay sa Kristyanong karanasan sa pamamagitan ng pilosopiya. Naging interesado si Gilson sa Kristyanong pilosopiya at kay Santo Tomas sa hangad niyang maghanap ng posibleng tagpûan ang katwiran at pananampalatayà. Ipinakita ng ibang kalahok sa debate na modelo nga ng ganitong gawâin si Santo Tomas ngunit hindî lámang siya o ang pilosopiyang kinakatawan niya ang may kakayanang isakatuparan ito. Isang puwang ito sa teorya ni Gilson na posible nating punôan. Importante ring maalala, gaya ng makikita natin sa debate, na ang Tomismo ay hindî isang-buô at waláng lamat na tradisyon. Ang tagisan at di-pagkakasundô ng mga iskolar na Tomista tungkol sa Kristyanong pilosopiya ay patunay sa patuloy na paghubog sa sarili ng nasabing tradisyon. Malayò ito samakatuwid sa hegemonya o dominasyon na kadalasang ibinibintang sa Tomismo lalò na dito sa Pilipinas. Kung totoo ang nasabing hegemonya, hindî na sana nagkaroon pa ng *Aeterni Patris* o ng debate ng dekada trenta o ng pananamlay ng Tomismo dito mismo sa ating bansâ.

Pangalawa, naganap ang debate sa pagsisikap ng mga inetelektwal na Franses na isulong ito. Nagtulong-tulong at nagkasundô ang mga may-relihiyon at silang walâ para itampok ang pinakamahalagang aspekto ng pamimilosopiya: ang debate. Bawat isa sa kanila ay naniniwalâ na ang debate ay hindî sigawan, o pataasan ng ihî o sabi nga ng nauusong salità ngayon, bardagulan. Nais kong balikan ang tema ng simposyum natin ngayon na hindî ko alam kung paano bigkasin nang tamâ sa Franses pero sa wari ko ay nangangahulogan sa Filipino ng “pagkabagabag.” Nangyari ang debate noong dekada trenta sapagkat nakaramdam ang mga inetelektwal na Franses ng pagkabagabag tungkol sa pilosopiya at relihiyon at sa posibleng pagsasanib nito sa anyô ng Kristyanong pilosopiya. Hindî ko sinasabi na dapat din tayong mabagabag sa isyung gaya ng sa kanila. Sa tingin ko, mas mahalaga at mas pundamental na itanong, hindî kung ano ang bumagabag sa atin, kundî kung nakararamdam pa kayâ tayo ng pagkabagabag sa ating pamimilosopiya. O baka naging kampante na tayo sa mga katotohanang nakasanayan o kinahumalingan na nating paniwalâan. At kung sakaling may pagkabagabag pa rin tayong nararamdaman, nababagabag pa kayâ tayo

---

<sup>46</sup> Tingnan sa Roque Ferriols, S.J., *Pilosopiya ng Relihiyon* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> Tingnan sa Karl Gaspar, C.Ss.R., *Handumanan (Remembrance): Digging for Indigenous Wellspring* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation Inc., 2021).

<sup>48</sup> Tingnan sa Kenneth C. Masong, *Becoming-Religion: Alfred North Whitehead and a Contemporary Philosophical Reflection* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Tingnan sa Raymun Festin, S.V.D., *The Black Nazarene and Philosophy* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2017).

sa tamang isyu o katanungan? Naalala ko tuloy ang katatapos na pandaigdigang turnamento sa basketball na ginanap sa Maynilà kamakailan. Daang-libong manonood ang nabagabag at nagalit sa isang coach dahil daw sa pagpapatupad ng maling sistema ng paglalarô.<sup>50</sup> Iniisip ko, bakit kayâ madali tayong mabagabag at magalit sa maling sistema ng basketball pero kayâ nating sikmurain ang isang maling sistema ng gobyerno? Sadyâ bang huminà o talagang nawalâ na ang kakayanan nating mabagabag kayâ hindi na tayo nababahalà sa balitang lihim na naubos ng Opisina ng Bise Presidente sa loob lámang ng labingsiyam na araw ang lihim na pondong nagkakahalaga ng 125 milyong piso na lihim na ibinigay, hindi ng Kongreso kundî ng Opisina ng Presidente mismo?<sup>51</sup> Binabagabag pa nga ba tayo ng relihiyon para hanapin ang mga bagay na tunay na maka-Diyos gaya ng katotohanan at katarungan? Binabagabag pa nga ba tayo ng pilosopiya para manindigan sa katwiran at hindi para “magdahilan” lámang? Paano nga ba magiging mitsang mulí ng pagkabagabag ang relihiyon at pilosopiya para sa atin na namimilosopiya at sa publikong pinaglalaanan natin nito?

Ang pangatlo at hulíng aral ay medyo maselan kayâ hulí ko nang sasabihin. Sa pamamagitan ni Gilson at ng debate ng dekada trenta, naihayag ang mahigpit bagaman komplikadong ugnayan ng pilosopiya at relihiyon. Ngunit maliban dito, nagbigay din ito ng pagkakataon na makita natin ang dikit na relasyon ng pilosopiya at wikà. Ang debate ng dekada trenta ay minsang tinawag din na “debateng Franses” sapagkat nilahukan ito ng mga intelektwal na Franses gamit ang wikang Franses. Sa katunayan, bagaman, nasundan na ng ilang kaparehang debate ang orihinal na paghaharap at marami na ring naisulat na reaksyon at kontra reaksyon dito, nito lámang 2011 nagkaroon ng salin ang debate sa Ingles. Magkahalòng paghangà, panghihinayang at panibughò ang naramdaman ko habang binabasa ang isinaling teksto. Ang paghangà ay para sa mga kalahok na intelektwal, lalo na kay Gilson at Maritain, sa kanilang kakayanan na panindigan ang kanilang mga ideya at tapatan ang mga kapwà iskolar na kontra sa kanila. Ang panghihinayang ay para sa kawalan ko ng kakayanan na magsalitâ at magbasa sa Franses. Iba siguro ang karanasan kung mababasa ang teksto sa orihinal na lengguwahe nito. Ang panibughò naman ay patungkol sa taas ng antas ng intelektwalisasyon ng wikang Franses at sa galíng at kahandâan ng mga iskolar ng Fransya na gamitin ito sa kanilang diskurso. Hindî ko

<sup>50</sup> Delfin Dioquino, “Chot says he stepped aside to avoid distraction, rues missed chance at redemption in Asian Games,” in *Rappler* (10 September 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/sports/gilas-pilipinas/chot-reyes-says-stepped-aside-avoid-distraction-rues-missed-chance-redemption-asian-games-2023/>>.

<sup>51</sup> Bonz Magsambol, “Why transfer of P125-M confidential funds to OVP sets dangerous precedent,” in *Rappler* (6 September 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/why-transfer-confidential-funds-office-vice-president-sets-dangerous-precedent/>>.

sinasabi na hindi ito nangyayari sa atin. Paminsan-minsan, mayroon din namang mangilan-ngilang pagkakataon na Filipino ang gamit ng mga Filipinong iskolar sa kanilang diskurso at akademikong pagtitipon. Hindi ko rin sinasabi na tumigil na tayo sa paggamit ng Ingles sa ating pagsusulat at pagtuturò. Ako rin ay kalahok sa kasalukuyang sitwasyon na nagsasadlak sa akin para pilitin ang sarili na magpanggap na káya kong magsalitâ at magsulat sa Ingles. Nakakabagabag lang na baka dumating talaga ang araw, katulad ng nagsisimulâ nang mangyari ngayon, na Filipino na ang maging estranghero sa ating pandinig kaysa Ingles; na baka tuluyan na nating kailanganin ang magsalin sa Ingles para maunawâan ang mga terminong Filipino na nababása o nadidinig; na bakâ talagang makombinse tayo na ang pamilosopiya ay sa Ingles o sa ibang wikâ lámang posibleng gawin at hindi sa Filipino na sariling atin. Nakakabagabag ito sa tingin ko. Pero, sa tingin ko rin, hindi pa ito ang sukdulan. Higit na nakakabagabag ang malámang hindi ito nakakabagabag sa marami. Sa tingin ko, walâng hihigit sa trahedya na balang araw ay magisnan nating ulilâ na tayo sa sariling wikâ dahil tayo mismo at walâ ng iba ang unang nagpabayâ.

### Konklusyon

Ang debate ng dekada trenta ay isang mahalagang pangyayari na nagtatampok sa malapit bagaman komplikadong relasyon ng relihiyon at pilosopiya. Malaki ang naging papel dito ni Etienne Gilson, partikular ang kanyang nosyon ng Kristyanong pilosopiya na hindi sinasadyâng nabuô at naisa-konsepto dahil sa pagaaral niya ng modernong kaisipan ni Descartes. Sa pagsisikap na higit na maunawâan si Descartes, natagpûan ni Gilson ang mismong argumento na magpapasubali hindi lámang sa kanya kundî pati na rin sa modernong pilosopiya na kanyang pinasinayâan. Ang nasabing argumento ang kinakatawan ng Kristyanong pilosopiya na para kay Gilson at sa mga iskolar na sumasangayon sa kanya ay isang malaking hakbang tungò sa pagtupad ng adhikâ ng *Aeterni Patris* ni Papa Leo XIII na mulîng maipakilala si Santo Tomas sa modernong panahon. Ang Kristyanong pilosopiya ni Gilson ay isa sa mga landas na naging susi sa pagpasok ni Santo Tomas sa tradisyon ng pilosopiyang Franses. Ang kasundôan at di-pagkakasundông pinukaw nito sa debate ay isang testamento na ang pagpapanumbalik kay Santo Tomas na minimithi ng *Aeterni Patris* ay hindi imposibleng makamit. Mithûin ito na patuloy na nagaanyaya sa atin na isulong ang diskurso, kontra o man pabor sa Kristyanong pilosopiya, at hindi urungan ang pagkabagabag na hatid nito.

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

## Sanggunian

- Abinales, Patricio N. & Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2005).
- Aertesen, Jan A., "Aquinas's philosophy in its historical setting" in Kretzmann, Norman & Eleonore Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Anderson, Benedict, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, (London: Verso Press, 2006).
- Betz, Hans Diether, "Antiquity and Christianity," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117:1 (Spring 1998), 3–22.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Birth of Christianity as a Hellenistic Religion: Three Theories of Origin," in *The Journal of Religion*, 74:1 (January 1994), 1–25.
- Cessario, Roman, O.P., *A Short History of Thomism*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).
- de los Santos, Epifanio, "Andres Bonifacio," in *Revista Filipina*, 3:1 (January and February 1918), 34–39, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/philamer/acp0898.0003.001/50?page=root;size=150;view=image>>.
- Dioquino, Delfin, "Chot says he stepped aside to avoid distraction, rues missed chance at redemption in Asian Games," in *Rappler* (10 September 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/sports/gilas-pilipinas/chot-reyes-says-stepped-aside-avoid-distraction-rues-missed-chance-redemption-asian-games-2023/>>.
- Elm, Susanna, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012).
- Ferriols, Roque, S.J. *Pilosopiya ng Relihiyon* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014).
- Festin, Raymun, S.V.D., *The Black Nazarene and Philosophy* (Manila: Logos Publications, Inc., 2017).
- Gaspar, Karl, C.Ss.R., *Handumanan (Remembrance): Digging for Indigenous Wellspring* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation Inc., 2021).
- Gilson, Etienne, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952).

- \_\_\_\_\_, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Christian Philosophy*, trans. Armand Maurer, (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1955).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *John Duns Scotus: Introduction to His Fundamental Positions*, trans. James Colbert, (New York: T&T Clark, 2018).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. Cecile Gilson, (New York: Random House, 1962).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Dom Illtyd Trethowan, (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy: The Gifford Lectures (1931–1932)*, trans. by A.H.C. Downes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Thomism: The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer, (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002).
- Gilson, Etienne & Thomas Langan, *Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, (New York: Random House, 1963).
- Griggs, C. Wilfred, "Rediscovering Ancient Christianity," in *Brigham Young University Studies*, 38:4 (1999), 73–90.
- Henneseey, James, "Leo XIII's Thomistic Revival: A Political and Philosophical Event," in *The Journal of Religion*, 58 (1978), "Supplement. Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure," 185–197.
- Hornedo, Florentino, *Ideas and Ideals: Essays in Filipino Cognitive History* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2001).
- Kerr, Fergus, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2003).
- Knasas, John F.X., *Being & Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).
- Kretzmann, Norman & Eleonore Stump, *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* (1874), in *The Holy See: Daily Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office*, <[https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)>.

- Magsambol, Bonz, "Why transfer of P125-M confidential funds to OVP sets dangerous precedent," in *Rappler* (6 September 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/why-transfer-confidential-funds-office-vice-president-sets-dangerous-precedent/>>.
- Maritain, Jacques, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. by Edward Flannery, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1955), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/aeocp00.htm>>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (London: The Centenary Press, 1937).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Range of Reason*, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1952), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/range.htm>>.
- Maritain, Raïssa, *The Angel of the Schools*, trans. Julie Kernan, in *The Jacques Maritain Center* (1942), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/sta.htm>>.
- Masong, Kenneth C., *Becoming-Religion: Alfred North Whitehead and a Contemporary Philosophical Reflection*, (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2015).
- McCool, Gerald A., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search of a Unitary Method*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Twentieth-Century Scholasticism," in *The Journal of Religion*, 58 (1978), "Supplement. Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure," 198–221.
- McInerney, Ralph, *The Very Rich Hours of Jacques Maritain: A Spiritual Life*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), <[https://maritain.nd.edu/assets/570350/mcinerney\\_the\\_very\\_rich\\_hours\\_of\\_jacques\\_maritain.pdf](https://maritain.nd.edu/assets/570350/mcinerney_the_very_rich_hours_of_jacques_maritain.pdf)>.
- Mojares, Resil B., *Brains of the Nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the Production of Modern Knowledge*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2018).
- Nussbaum, Martha, *Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- Perrier, Joseph Louis, *The Revival of Scholastic Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1909), <<https://www3.nd.edu/~maritain/jmc/etext/perrier.html>>.
- Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus* (1846), in *Papal Encyclicals Online*, <<https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quiplu.htm>>.



- Sadler, Gregory, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Christian Philosophy: The 1930s French Debates," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://iep.utm.edu/christian-philosophy-1930s-french-debate/>>.
- Schafer, Peter, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012).
- Shook, Laurence K., *Etienne Gilson*, (Ontario: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984).
- Simon, Marcel, "Early Christianity and Pagan Thought: Confluences and Conflicts," in *Religious Studies*, 9:4 (December 1973), 385–399.
- Striker, Gisela, "Ataraxia: Happiness as Tranquility," in *The Monist*, 73:1 (January 1990), "Hellenistic Ethics," 97–110.
- Thomas, Megan C., *Orientalists, Propagandists and Ilustrados: Filipino Scholarship and the End of Spanish Colonialism* (Mandaluyong: Anvil Publishing Inc., 2016).
- Torrell, Jean-Pierre, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and his Work*, trans. by Robert Royal (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).
- Weisheipl, James A., O.P., *Friar Thomas D' Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Commentary" in Victor B. Brezik, C.S.B., *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981).

## The Body and Marcel's Notion of Embodied Subjectivity

---

*Jove Jim S. Aguas*

**Abstract:** In recent years, the human body has been the focus of discussions in many fields, not only those naturally related to the body, like medicine and other health sciences, but also in the social sciences and philosophy. The human body is a fundamental matter that underlies most of the biological, health, physical, social, cultural, and even religious issues today. From a philosophical perspective, it has been hitherto considered, albeit in a very restricted manner. But today, philosophical discussions about it cover more ground, not just about its relationship with the mind or spirit, but its social and political significance, its relation to values and work, its relation to cognition and identity, and care of the self, among others. In this paper, I mainly focus on Marcel's notion of embodiment as our unique and intimate relationship with our body that shows our subjectivity as an embodied subject. I discuss how such an intimate relationship is experienced through our feeling of our body, and how our embodied self enables us to relate with others and participate in the world. To provide a philosophical background, I first traced the important conceptions about the body from the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary philosophers.

**Keywords:** Marcel, body, embodied subjectivity, feeling

**M**y body, my choice. In the present time, the body has become the locus of self-expression. Some people have focused on their physical appearance and how they project their physical image onto others. How people project or treat their bodies is a way to express oneself. Since it is one's body, then it is one's choice to do whatever one wants to do with it. However, the body is not something that one just "possesses," and therefore, one can do whatever he or she wants to do with it. Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973)<sup>1</sup> draws a distinction between "having a body" and "being

---

<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

a body.” The body is an expression of who we are; we are our bodies. Therefore, whatever we do with, for, or about it, reflects selves and entails responsibility. There is a danger of absolutizing one’s choice when it comes to the body. Choice is not absolute, and it always involves responsibility, responsibility for oneself and for others. If a choice involves and impacts the welfare or life of others, then one must weigh and carefully consider his or her choices and their consequences.

Often, societal perception of self-worth is measured by one’s physical or bodily appearance; hence, there is a tendency to focus too much attention on physical appearance and how to look physically attractive. It is not bad to focus on one’s body as it is part of who a person is. Care for the self as the life-long commitment to ensure holistic well-being of oneself, includes caring for the body and promoting physical and mental health, prevention and management of illness when it occurs, and comparatively better quality of life. Of course, there is a difference between being concerned with only the appearance and image projected to others and commitment to the total well-being of the body. But if a person is only focused on projecting an image, there can be the danger of a disconnect between what one really is and the image that one projects. The commitment to the body is far more profound than projecting an image or an appearance. The human body is not just an image or a projection; it is part of who the person really is; it is part of his personality—the physical aspect of one’s personality.

While the human body is part of who one is, it can be considered both a blessing and a hindrance. For a person endowed with a well-developed and healthy body, it is a blessing, while for those with some bodily disabilities or deformities, it could be a hindrance or a curse. Still, others may not be comfortable with the body they were born with, especially when it comes to sexuality. Others may consider altering some body parts or organs to enhance their physical appearance, even altering their natural and innate bodily constitution. But then again, choices involve accountability. Whatever attitudes, perceptions, perspectives, or notions we may have about the human body, one thing is certain: it is part of our identity and, as such, has its worth and dignity. The human body defines who we are as persons and is an essential aspect of our personality.<sup>2</sup> It is the body that is the foundation of our physical and biological existence.

---

<sup>2</sup> Jove Jim S. Aguas, “Karol Wojtyła’s Notion of the Body: Corporeality and Human Sexuality,” paper presented in the *International Congress on Catholic and Corporeality* (The University of Social and Media Culture, Torun, Poland, 24–25 November 2023).

## Philosophy of the Body

The duality of the body and soul has been a basic framework of Western philosophy. Since the time of the Greeks, the body has always been considered separate and opposed to the soul. Plato considered man as a soul trapped in the body, and the body, with all its desires, prevents the soul from attaining the knowledge of the forms. Rene Descartes (1596–1650) proposed an exaggerated type of dualism of the body and soul and claimed that they are separate substances with respective properties of thought and extension. During medieval times, the body was suspected of being sinful or unclean, and one needed to purge it through fasting and abstinence. In general, the body has always been considered either an instrument of the soul or a second-rate partner of the soul or mind, which often keeps the soul from exercising its capacities. However, in contemporary philosophy, the body is more understood and appreciated as an integral part of our human identity, an expression of our freedom, and a vital component of human relations. Existentialist philosophers shed light on the proper understanding of the human body and dispel the notion that the body is a source of corruption and that it is just an object that can be used or manipulated for whatever purpose of the individual.<sup>3</sup>

A lasting conversation about the body and soul is portrayed during the last days of Socrates (469–399 BC) in prison prior to his death. His conversation with his close friends focused on the true philosopher's attitude towards death. His companions appear to be surprised at Socrates, who appears to be unperturbed and willing to die and justifies this willingness to die. Socrates asserts that the philosopher is always pursuing death, and it will be inconsistent with his pursuit if he refuses it now that it is at hand. Socrates says: "he who has lived as a true philosopher has reason to be of good cheer when he is about to die, and that after death he may hope to receive the greatest good in the other world."<sup>4</sup> According to Socrates, the philosopher seeks and enjoys the pleasure of the body—food, drinks, sex, and other pleasures—but only to the extent that they are necessary to live. Beyond this, he despises them because bodily pleasures obtained from senses, desires, and feelings hinder the soul in its search for knowledge of true existence. He says that thought is clearest when the body least influences it; hence, knowledge can be fully obtained when there is a separation between the soul (which includes the mind) and the body. However, that separation of the body and the soul happens in death. Socrates, in asking Simmias if Simmias believed in death, explains that death is the separation of the soul

<sup>3</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 64.

## 78 THE BODY

and the body after which the soul exists in herself and is parted from the body and the body is parted from the soul.<sup>5</sup>

The philosopher, therefore, whose object is the truth obtained by the clear vision of the soul and who tries to detach himself from the confusing vision of the body, is constantly practicing a kind of death. Socrates says that the philosopher attains the knowledge of the highest purity with the mind alone and does not allow in the act of thought any intrusion of the senses to accompany reason. Thus, Socrates continues,

With the very light of the mind in her clearness penetrates into the very fight of truth in each; he has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body, which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of knowledge when in company with her ....<sup>6</sup>

Like any other compound thing, Plato (c.429–c.347 BC) considered the body a perishable physical object. The soul, on the other hand, resembles the essences or *forms* and shares in their permanence. Bodies are considered matter without thoughts and fundamentally different from their souls or minds.

Aristotle (c.384–322 BC) rejects Plato's conception of the relation of the body and soul and proposes a different conception of the body and the soul. His idea about the body and soul is based on his theory of hylomorphism, which explains the composition of corporeal substances. All corporeal or physical substances are composed of matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*).<sup>7</sup> Matter is the indeterminate but determinable component, while form is the determining component of a corporeal substance. The form constitutes its essence, the essence being the set of qualities that make the substance what it is. Matter is the principle of individuation, which means that matter or the body individualizes a corporeal substance, making it different from others; it could also refer to the collection of possibilities from which something else may be actualized. The form signifies actuality, while matter signifies potentiality. The matter of a human (or any other living thing) is its body, which is made up of organs, but the organs are only organs when they are part of a living thing. The body, too, is only a body when it is part of a living thing. The soul is the form of a living thing.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, in Richard McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 412a15–16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 412a19–21.

Although the body has a minimal role or function, the Greek conception of the body was not entirely negative. During Ancient times, the body was also associated with health (and disease), power, and athleticism. Many Scholastics subscribed to the hylomorphic theory of Aristotle, and one of them was St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). According to St. Thomas Aquinas, intelligence is a proper capacity of the human soul that does not need the cooperation of any organ in its operations. The human soul is also the “form of the body,” and just as every form is the principle of all the operations of the informed matter, the human soul is the principle of all operations performed by the body through its various organs.<sup>9</sup> However, we can see that St. Thomas also acknowledges the role of the body through the senses in his theory of knowledge. It is through the senses that we gain access to the external world and perceive the material and concrete qualities of the external objects.

The role of the body during the Ancient and Medieval periods is sparingly recognized, and there is a generally negative view of the body in relation to the soul, spirit, or mind, especially in the soul's ascent to eternal life. During the medieval period, the body was looked upon with suspicion as something that needed to be purged or cleansed if one wanted to attain eternal life. Some strands opposed a pure soul to a sinful body. The Gnostics, for example, saw the human spirit as naturally good, but it is imprisoned in the body, which was naturally evil. We can trace this back to Plato, who stressed that the soul that is purified of bodily pleasure through philosophy may enter immediately into the blissful company of the gods. People tend to consider the body as a thing without comprehension, choice, or judgment, contrary to the self-determination and free will of the soul or mind. The body is seen as a mere instrument of the soul.<sup>10</sup>

During the Modern period, Descartes contends that there are two separate substances, namely the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*; the mind is a *res cogitans*, and the body is a *res extensa*. The mind is a separate substance because it does not depend on the body to exist or be understood. The mind and the body are separate because they have different attributes. However, according to Descartes, the human body is closely connected with the mind. “It may also be concluded that a certain body is more closely united to our mind than any other, from the fact that pain and any other of our sensations occur without our foreseeing them; and that mind is conscious that these do not arise from itself alone, nor pertain to it is so far as it is a thinking thing, but only in so far as it is united to another thing, extended and mobile, which

---

<sup>9</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (USA: Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947), Ia.76.a1; *Contra Gentiles*, (New York: Hanover House, 1955–57), II, 57 and 58.

<sup>10</sup> See a similar discussion in my paper, “Karol Wojtyła’s Notion of the Body.”

is called the human body.<sup>11</sup> Descartes' dualistic position attracted many critics. Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) denied this dualism and argued that mind and body are the very same thing “expressed in two ways.” Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) both denied that distinct created substances (such as mind and body) could really have a causal influence on each other.

In the contemporary period, there were philosophers who recognized the importance of the body and stressed its important role in the total structure of the human person. One of them is Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), who shows the limit of an objective interpretation of the body and provides an alternative understanding of the body across a series of domains, including the experience of one's own body, lived space, sexuality, and language. Merleau-Ponty describes the body's typical mode of existence as “being-toward-the-world”—a pre-objective orientation toward a vital situation that is explicable in terms of third-person causal interactions or by explicit judgments or representations.<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty related the understanding of time, space, the other, the natural world, freedom, and intersubjectivity to the body. Karol Wojtyła (1920–2005), or John Paul II, stressed the importance of the body to man's existence and identity.<sup>13</sup> Wojtyła considers the body as part of the psychosomatic unity of the human person. The body manifests the somatic constitution of man, and in order to fully understand the human person, we need to shed light on his somatic dynamism.<sup>14</sup> According to Wojtyła, the body is the basis of our corporeality. As human beings, we are not only rational but also corporeal because of our bodies. The body is also the basis of our differentiation as male or female and, therefore, the basis of our sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault (1926–1984) focused on the body in his analysis of phenomena such as psychosis, clinical medicine, and prison systems. Foucault explained how power mechanisms relate directly to the human body, its many functions, and its physiological processes, feelings, and enjoyment.<sup>16</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the philosophy of the body focused more on essential questions of human society and culture,

---

<sup>11</sup> Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy, Principles of Philosophy*, trans. by John Veitch, Part II.2, in *The Classical Library* (2002), <<http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/principles/>>.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962).

<sup>13</sup> Aguas, “Karol Wojtyła's Notion of the Body.”

<sup>14</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, USA; London, England: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979).

<sup>15</sup> See Jove Jim S. Aguas, “The Philosophical Foundation of John Paul II's Notions of Marriage and Unity of Man and Woman in His Theology of the Body,” in *Philippiniana Sacra*, 55:164 (January–April 2020), 51–74.

<sup>16</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (London/New York: Routledge, 2006) and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989).

thus providing an original and detailed analysis of human nature and its roles and performances in social operations. It also showed the operating mechanisms and internal contradictions of contemporary Western society.<sup>17</sup>

Gabriel Marcel's notion of man is clearly expressed in his description of man as an incarnate subjectivity. He explains that philosophy of existence must have a concrete point of departure, not just a logical certitude, but an existential indubitable, and that is man's incarnate subjectivity or embodiment. The following sections discuss Marcel's thoughts on the body, specifically on embodiment, feeling, and participation.

### Marcel on Man as Embodied Subjectivity

For Marcel, the human person or man is not an epistemological specimen meant to be analyzed and dissected; the person is a concrete individual, a human being who manifests his existence through his body. As a concrete and embodied subject, he is not found in the arid and empty generalizations of specialized investigations about what happens to a person or in the uncritical examination of the etymology of the word person.<sup>18</sup> What really counts is the concrete individual. He writes:

The empirical self-in-general is a fiction. What exists and counts is such an individual, the real individual I am, with the incredibly minute detail of his experience, with all the specifications of the concrete adventure that belongs to him to live and to him alone, not to another being.<sup>19</sup>

Man is not a self-enclosed ego; he is open and disclosed to the world and to others. This openness to the world and others is made possible through his body. Because of his embodiment, he is able to participate in the world and relate with others. Intersubjectivity and human relations and interaction are possible because man has a body; he is an embodied or incarnate subjectivity. Man cannot reach out and make his subjectivity known without the body; in fact, he cannot act with the body. Marcel believes

---

<sup>17</sup> Duoyi Fei, "From 'the mind isolated with the body' to 'the mind being embodied:' Contemporary Approaches to the Philosophy of the Body," in *Cultures of Science*, 3:3 (September 2020), 206–219, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2096608320960242>>.

<sup>18</sup> Jove Jim S. Aguas, "The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité," in *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts*, 5:2 (December 2016), 21.

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 19.



## 82 THE BODY

that Descartes's view of the self is not an accurate description of how the self actually is in experience. By focusing too much on the analysis of clear and distinct ideas, he overlooked the fact that our first contact with the world is without any mediation from clear and distinct ideas or clear representations.<sup>20</sup> For Marcel, man's fundamental situation in the world, which defines his "ideas," and any description of them has a reference to a human body and its place or "situation" in existence.<sup>21</sup> The human subject is fundamentally embodied being-in-a-situation and is not primarily a thinking or knowing subject. It ensures that one's experience and knowledge of the world will be shaped by his or her situation, and such a situation determines the complex web of relations that one finds himself or herself intimately involved in at any given moment of his or her existence. One is not just a spectator of life or one's life; one is involved in the various projects and practices that shape his or her life.<sup>22</sup> He or she exists in a specific context by virtue of his or her particular embodied context in the world. This embodied situation is defined by his or her particular spatial and temporal location, general and personal history, cultural and economic context, etc.<sup>23</sup> This experience of embodiment ensures that the person is a being-in-a-situation

Marcel grounds his notion of man on his description of man as an embodied (incarnate) subjectivity. For him, a philosophy of existence must have a concrete point of departure, not just a logical certitude but an existential indubitable.<sup>24</sup> He posits that any attempt to define existence must have a "touchstone of existence."<sup>25</sup> If Descartes finds this in the *cogito* and clear ideas, Marcel finds his starting point in the immediacy of lived experience itself. If Descartes starts his philosophical reflection with a methodic doubt towards establishing the *cogito*, thus making the *cogito* the central datum of metaphysical reflection, Marcel considers the incarnate being as the central datum of metaphysical reflection starting off with experience, particularly the experience of embodiment, that is, the experience of being a body. Therefore, Descartes's *cogito* lacks concreteness and cannot be constituted as an existential point of departure. Marcel's existential point of departure, his indubitable, is the incarnate being or the incarnate or embodied subjectivity. Marcel's central datum of existence is embodied

---

<sup>20</sup> Brendan Sweetman, "Gabriel Marcel: Being and Having," in Michael Kuhnlein ed., *Philosophy of Religion and Critical Analysis of Religion: A Handbook* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2018), 569.

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

<sup>22</sup> Brendan Sweetman ed., *A Gabriel Marcel Reader* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2011), 69.

<sup>23</sup> Sweetman, "Gabriel Marcel: Being and Having," 570.

<sup>24</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being I*, (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 109.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

(incarnate) subjectivity, that is, the affective unity that the self has with its body. According to Marcel, incarnate subjectivity is the touchstone of existence; denying it would make any assertion that anything else existed would become quite inconceivable.<sup>26</sup> Existence has always been a reference to one's body, so "when I affirm that something exists, I always mean that I consider that something as connected with my body, as able to be put in contact with it, however indirect this contact may be."<sup>27</sup> For Marcel, the only way that man can exist in the world and think about the world and relate with the world and others is by being embodied, or incarnate that is, to be a body. It is through embodiment or incarnation that the person is present in the world; it is because of the body that the person is able to express his subjectivity.<sup>28</sup>

### Being and Having, Problem and Mystery

To fully grasp man's embodiment and relation with the world, Marcel relates it to the two modes of man's relation with the world, namely, *having* and *being*. "*Having*," according to Marcel, is our normal mode of relating to the world; it does not simply imply possession or acquiring of possessions; rather, it represents a stance and way of dealing with our world, of organizing and mastering it. *Having* is characterized by abstraction from the concrete reality; we seek to objectify our world, viewing it as an object to be possessed and controlled. We approach situations principally as problems to be solved, e.g., "I wonder how it works? What is wrong? What does she want." The basic relation becomes one of objectification, manipulation, control, and domination. In the case of persons, we tend to characterize or categorize. *Having* always has something to do with what is external to us, independent of us. Further, Marcel writes:

What we *have* obviously presents an appearance of externality to ourselves. But it is not an absolute externality. In principle, what we *have* are things (or what can be compared to things, precisely in so far as this comparison is possible). I can only *have*, in the strict sense of the word, something whose existence is, up to a certain point, independent of me.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> Marcel, *Being and Having*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Aguas, "The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité", 21.

<sup>29</sup> Marcel, *Being and Having*, 155.

The mode of relating, which Marcel terms '*being*', is completely opposite to that of '*having*.' *Being* is essential to our personal relationships as well as to our living richly human events. When one approaches the world with the attitude of '*being*,' that world appears as something he participates in. I am immersed in it, and it appears to me not as an object but as a presence. I deal with the concrete experience and not the abstraction.

*Being* and *having* are related to two modes of awareness or attitudes towards reality, which Marcel calls *problem* and *mystery*.<sup>30</sup> A *problem* is a question in which the identity of the person asking the question is not an issue; it is an issue that can be considered objectively and so one is not personally involved in the issue at hand. A *mystery*, on the other hand, is something that affects one personally, and so one is involved. Marcel elaborates:

A problem is something that I meet, which I find completely before me, but which I can, therefore, lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can, therefore, only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity.<sup>31</sup>

Marcel stresses that a *problem* is in some way outside us, something apart from our intimate experience and something towards which we adopt a merely impersonal attitude. Hence, it can become an object of general knowledge and public inquiry. In scientific investigation it is possible to make a clear-cut distinction between the subject who inquires and the object which is being investigated. Hence, in a sense, a problem emerges as something definite and specific, detached and of a fixed pattern. This is revealed through the way in which we believe that a given problem may be resolved in terms of a 'solution' that can be tested and verified in experience. A mystery is personal, one that is deeply connected to the subject and, therefore, cannot be objectified, verified, or universalized based on some data. There are data that by their very nature cannot be set against the self

---

<sup>30</sup> Marcel relates this to his conception of the broken world when he states that the broken world is one that is "on the one hand, riddled with problems and, on the other, determined to allow no room for mystery." The denial of the mysterious is symptomatic of the modern broken world and is tied to its technical character, which only acknowledges that which technique can address: the problematic. See Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, translated by Manya Harari, (New York: Citadel, 1995), 12.

<sup>31</sup> Marcel, *Being and Having*, 117.

because such data involves the self.<sup>32</sup> According to Marcel it is a “problem that encroaches on its own data.”<sup>33</sup> Such a “problem” is, in fact, meta-problematic; it is a question in which the identity of the questioner is an issue. On the level of the mysterious, the identity of the questioner is tied to the question. A question that involves one’s intentions or longings is deeply connected to the person and, therefore, cannot be considered objectively or detached from the person. Its resolution involves the person, and it cannot just be resolved by logic or standard procedure; thus, it is “mysterious.”

*Problem* as an attitude of interpreting reality or things that happen in reality is related to the mode of *having*. Indeed, there is much in our everyday life that genuinely presents itself as a problem to be solved. There is a genuine problem, and we must go about the normal logical thinking process to come to some sort of solution. When we are faced with genuine problems, there is no other logical course of action but to maintain the attitude of *having* and seek a solution. We can lay down certain conditions or procedures necessary for the acceptance of any particular solution as valid. When those conditions are satisfactorily fulfilled and the procedure is followed, then we say that the solution has been 'verified.' We presuppose that such verification is carried out by the mind of a 'depersonalized subject' or a detached and objective investigator who is able to reach exactly the same conclusion as any other investigator. This is an essential condition for the establishment of any kind of objective knowledge. Unlike *problems*, *mysteries* cannot be solved with techniques and verified and standard procedures and, therefore, cannot be answered the same way by different people. A verified procedure, technique, or solution will not apply in the different cases presented by different persons. *Mystery* differs from person to person precisely because it is tied to the person. In fact, we wonder if *mysteries* are open to “solutions” at all, because it is non-objectifiable.<sup>34</sup> *Problem* belongs to the realm of *having*, while *mystery* belongs to the realm of *being*.

Our personal experience of embodiment is one of *mystery*. Marcel explains that the experience of our embodiment is given to us in a way that is not exclusively objective. Our first experience of our embodiment is that “it is my body.” We cannot think of our own embodiment as a problem, the body as something detached from us because as soon as we think of it as a problem, it ceases to be my embodiment, but be, and it becomes a problem of embodiment. Thus, we move from personal experience to abstraction. Marcel, thus relates *being* and *having*, *problem* and *mystery* to embodiment.

---

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 32.

<sup>33</sup> Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Gallagher, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, 37.

The body or my body, insofar as it is *my* body, is both something that I have and something that I am. If I look at my body in a disassociated manner and see it instrumentally and objectively, I am distancing myself from it in order to grasp it *qua* object; hence it ceases to be *my* body, but just *a* body, just like how others may look at this body. In this sense, I can have *a* body, but not *my* body. However, when I make the connection that the body in question is *my* body and not just *a* body or anybody's body, then it is no longer just something that I *have*; this body is also me; it is what I *am*—*I am my body*.

This distinction between *my* body and *a* body or *I have a body* and *I am a body* points out not only the distinction between *being* and *having* but also shows how we relate to other things and persons differently through these two modes. *Having* corresponds to things that are completely external to us. I have things that I possess that I can dispose of—and this should make it clear that I cannot *have*, for example, another person. *Having* implies this possession because “*having* always implies an obscure notion of assimilation.” While the encounter with otherness takes place in terms of assimilation when speaking of *having*, the encounter with other persons can also take place on the level of *being*. In this case Marcel maintains that the encounter is not one that is purely external and, as such, it is played out in terms of presence and participation rather than assimilation. *Being* is the opposite of *having*; it is essential to our personal relationships and living richly human events. When one approaches the world with the attitude of *being*, that world appears as something he participates in. The person is immersed in it, and it appears to him not as an object but as a presence. My body is apprehended as presence, and the *thou* or other is given as co-presence; these are not acts of being, but modes of being.<sup>35</sup>

### Embodied Subjectivity

Let us dig deeper into what Marcel means by embodied or incarnate. “To be incarnated is to appear to oneself as body, as this particular body, without being identified with it nor distinguished from it.”<sup>36</sup> Man as a subject appears and exists in the world and relates with other beings as a *body*. Marcel, however, clarifies that embodiment does not mean being identified or distinguished as a *body*. Man is not distinguished from other things as a *body*. He stresses that identification and distinction are correlative operations that only pertain to the realm of objects, and man is definitely not an object. The *body*, though considered something, is not just an object; hence, it can neither be identified nor distinguished from the self. “Of this *body*, I can neither say

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 20.

that it is I, nor that it is not I, nor that it is for me (object). The opposition of subject and object is found to be transcended from the start."<sup>37</sup>

Embodiment implies the unique experience of intimacy of one's body; the *body as mine*, as my lived body. Without the principle of intimacy, the body would just be anybody's body and would just be like any "*body*." Marcel observes that a purely objective conception of the body fails to recognize the bond that exists between the self or me and my body. Embodiment or "*incarnation* is the situation of a being who appears to himself to be, as it were, bound to his body."<sup>38</sup>

Marcel further distinguishes between *a* body or a body-object and *my* body or body-subject. *A* body is something; *a* body is a particular body that is ostensibly definable; it is definite, fixed, and can be applied to any person. There is some anonymity to *a* body because it could be referred to just any other person. To consider the body as an object is to consider it something that can be scientifically known, labeled, and categorized. The body, considered an object, can be analyzed, studied, used, and even manipulated. Just like any other object, it can be treated as an instrument or a commodity. However, the body is no instrument; any instrument is a means of extending or strengthening the original power possessed by the person who uses it. A hammer, for example, extends the capacity of a carpenter. However, the hammer as an instrument is something outside or external to the carpenter or the person; to consider the *body* as an instrument is to consider it as external to the person. However, the *body* is not external; it is the person himself.

My *body* is not a possession or an instrument; however, it is what makes possession and instrumentality possible. The intimate relationship between me and my body is a unique relationship for while it is described as a unity, such *unity* cannot be described as an identity. Hence, the body is not just *a* body; it is *my* body. *A* body is objective; my body is me. "*I am* my body in so far as I succeed in recognizing that this body of mine *cannot*, in the last analysis, be brought down to the level of being this object, *an* object, a something or other."<sup>39</sup> There is a difference between *having* a body and *being* a body. In the case of persons and our body, we tend to characterize or categorize.

Insofar as it is *my* body, my body is both something that I have and am. I can see my body in a disassociated manner and see it instrumentally, but in doing so, in distancing myself from it to grasp it *qua* object, it ceases to be *my* body. I can have *a* body, but not *my* body. As soon as I make the connection that the body in question is *my* body, not just *a* body, it can no longer

---

<sup>37</sup> Marcel, *Being and Having*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 124.

be something that I have; this body is also me; it is what I am. “*My body is my body just insofar as I do not consider it in this detached fashion; I do not put a gap between myself and it. To put this point in another way, my body is mine in so far as for me, my body is not an object, but rather, I am my body.*”<sup>40</sup> Hence, “to say that I *am* my body is to negate, to deny, to erase that gap which, on the other hand, I would be postulating as soon as I asserted that my body was merely my instrument.”<sup>41</sup> Marcel further explains: “Speaking of *my body* is, in a certain sense, a way of speaking of myself; it places me at a point where either I have not yet reached the instrumental relationship, or I have passed beyond it.”<sup>42</sup>

### Feeling and Embodiment

However, how can we say that it is really our body? What is the primary mode by which I can say that this is really *my body*? Marcel answers because we feel our body. Feeling is the primordial modality of embodiment. Marcel says,

*My body, insofar as it is properly mine, presents itself to me in the first instance as something felt; I am my body only insofar as I am a being that has feelings. From this point of view, it seems, therefore, that my body is endowed with an absolute priority in relation to everything that I can feel that is other than my body itself ....*<sup>43</sup>

The radical feeling of *my body* as intimately mine as a sense of embodiment is manifested through the internal perception, which Marcel calls *coenesthetic*. This feeling of coenesthesia places me as an embodied being in such experiences as being tired, hungry, energetic and enthusiastic. According to Marcel, this is a primordial feeling because it allows me to experience my body as mine. This primordial feeling lies at the root of all other feelings, such as sensations and activities that immediately connect me with the surrounding objects of the world. It takes absolute priority because to feel anything else, I must first feel my body as mine. My immediate contact

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

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

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

with my body puts me in direct contact with the world.<sup>44</sup> Feeling implies two mutually implicative acts: the internal perception of my body and the external perception of the world, and there are no gaps between these acts.<sup>45</sup>

Our internal perception or inner awareness of our body is not based on observation, although one's body is something that can be perceived by one's self and others. A person then or an "I" is at once a body-subject and a body-object. So, the body can be both a content of inner awareness and an object of public knowledge. The inner experience or awareness of one's body or sense of embodiment is fused with an awareness of one's self as being in the world; it means that one is not just a body but that he is being in the world with and for others. Being a body, as the very mode of existence, carries with it an awareness of its intersubjective bond with the existing beings around it. The experience of one's body is basically the feeling of one's sense of community with oneself and with the world.<sup>46</sup>

If, for Descartes, the foundation of existence in the world is the cogito for Marcel, the original datum is not "I think" nor "I am alive," but rather "I experience," and experience is founded on embodiment. Marcel writes:

When I assert: I exist, I certainly mean something more than this; I vaguely imply that I am not only for myself but that I manifest myself, or rather am manifested; the prefix *ex* in *exist*, has primary significance because it conveys the meaning of a movement towards the external world, a centrifugal tendency. I exist: that means I have something by which I can be known or identified, either by another person or by myself insofar as I assume for myself borrowed otherness; none of these characteristics are separable from the fact that "there is my body."<sup>47</sup>

The body is definitely our connection or mediator with the world. Objectively, the world may appear to be something detached from the self, but because of the body, we become aware that we are being in the world. The body establishes our presence in the world, which we understand from an existential point of view. Of course, Marcel does not dismiss the objective altogether, but he is trying to drive home the "primacy of the existential over

---

<sup>44</sup> Erwin Straus and Michael Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn eds., *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1984), 131.

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

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-128.

<sup>47</sup> Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 17.



the ideal" with the understanding that the existential is related to embodiment or incarnate subjectivity. The world objectively exists, and there is no way we can deny this fact, but our existence in the world is manifested or experienced through embodiment; we relate with the world and everything in it through our body by being incarnate or embodied. Embodiment then becomes the basis of the self's relation or participation in the world.<sup>48</sup>

### Embodiment and Participation

In Marcel's thought, relation with the world is a kind of participation; participation is the crossing over of boundaries between the embodied self and the world. This participation or relation is made possible by our sensation or feeling of the world. Marcel works out his own theory of sensation or feeling as a form of participation with the world. First, he distinguishes two kinds of participation: objective participation and non-objective participation.<sup>49</sup> Objective participation is taking part or simply having a share in something. For example, I participate in the ownership of some commodity or property. I have objective participation in my parents' property or I have a share in the food prepared for our meal. In objective participation, one is concerned with data; I am interested in how many of us will share in the property, how it will be shared or divided, and who will take part in the sharing. There is also non-objective participation, as when we participate in a ceremony or an activity. In prayer, for example, one can participate in the adoration. Here, one is no longer interested in data or facts; one is no longer interested in how many are the participants in the adoration or the place of the ceremony or activity. So, here we "arrive at the notion of an act of participation which no longer leaves any place for the objectivity of a datum or even a notification."<sup>50</sup> Marcel further reflects on what he refers to as emergent and submerged participation. In non-objective participation, one thing can be observed and that is the reality that it presupposes an idea on which it depends. In our example, the prayer ceremony or adoration is dependent on the idea of God. Hence, it is by virtue of the idea that participation emerges. Marcel stresses, "The idea, around which non-objective participation becomes possible, is itself the principle of the emergence of participation."<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 127–128.

<sup>49</sup> See Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 137–139.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

However, there is a kind of non-objective participation that is not yet emergent but *submerged*. This submerged participation is a feeling below the level of idea or thought; it is a feeling that has yet to emerge into a conscious idea of its own intentionality.<sup>52</sup> While emergent participation is reflective, submerged participation is pre-reflective, but both are modes of feeling. The pre-reflective or submerged feeling is a primordial mode of embodiment. The feeling of community, which mediates every contact with the world, can be brought to the level of consciousness through reflection. The feeling of the body as *mine* is a continuous process of the participation of the self in its embodied situation in the world; this participation can range from the submerged to the emergent. However, because of the submerged participation, the body becomes the “*non-mediatizable immediate*.” Marcel explains,

In so far as it is my body, or the feeling which is not separable from my body as mine, our perspective changes, and we have to recognize the need to postulate the existence of what I will call a non-serializable *immediate*, which is the very root of our existence.<sup>53</sup>

So, in a sense, self, body, and world are not three distinct spheres of reality with clearly definable boundaries but rather fluid categories that flow into one another and define themselves in relation to one another.<sup>54</sup> But the key to the relation of the self and the world is the feeling of the body as a mode of participation; because of the feeling of the body, the self and the world are defined and related. Participation, understood as feeling, ensures that as an embodied being, man is not just a spectator positioned over other objects in the world. Man is not just a detached observer but a participant in the world. Man constitutes himself only in his own intentional acts, but he is already engaged in his own existential situation even before he can stand back and observe what is going on prior to his thinking. Hence, more primordial than our cognition of the world is our participation through the feeling of our body in the world. Embodiment and its mode of feeling as participation is the foundation of our experience and existence in the world. These are thoughts that are very similar to Karol Wojtyla, who also thought of participation,<sup>55</sup> where participation is explained as a property of person and action. First, it is a property of the person, a property that expresses itself

---

<sup>52</sup> Straus and Machado, “Marcel’s Notion of Incarnate Being,” 127.

<sup>53</sup> Marcel, *Mystery of Being*, 135.

<sup>54</sup> Straus and Machado, “Marcel’s Notion of Incarnate Being,” 128.

<sup>55</sup> See Wojtyla, *Acting Person*; See also, Karol Wojtyla, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in *Review of Metaphysics*, 33 (December 1979), 273–308.

in the ability of the human being to endow his own existence and activity with a personal dimension when he exists and acts together with others. Secondly, it is a positive relation to the humanity of others, that is, as a personal self, in each instance unique and unrepeatably.<sup>56</sup> Participation, as a property of person and action can only happen through the body. It is through the body that we relate with others, share our thoughts and intentions and act together with others. It is through the body that we experience, encounter, and participate in the world.

From an objective point of view, the body can be construed as one body among other bodies. However, in this sense, the body is treated as an object with objectivity properties. The body then becomes problematic because it is considered already detached from the self and, therefore, external to it. This detachment, albeit essentially illusory, becomes the basis of any cognition about the body. Hence, from an objective and cognitive point of view, there is a kind of dualism between the self and the body. But such dualism is inconceivable from an existential point of view.

One has an inner awareness of his body, which is not based on observation, although one's body is something that one's self and others can perceive. A person then or an "I" is at once a body-subject and a body-object. The body is a content of inner awareness and an object of public knowledge. This inner experience or awareness of one's body or sense of embodiment is fused with an awareness of one's self as being in the world; it means that one is not just a body but a being in the world with and for others. Being a body, as the very mode of existence, carries with it an awareness of its intersubjective bond with the existing beings around it. The experience of one's body is basically the feeling of one's sense of community with oneself and with the world.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

The body is not just an object or an instrument that we can just objectify, manipulate, or control. It is not something that we just have or possess and therefore can do anything we want with it; it is an essential component of who we are as human persons. The body is not just a secondary component of our personhood; it shares equal worth through different functions with the mind or spirit. As human persons, we are both body and spirit. And just as persons, we are dignified; we must also dignify our bodies. While we can showcase our physical appearance, we need to be mindful that

---

<sup>56</sup> Jove Jim S. Aguas, *Person, Action and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2014), 163–169.

<sup>57</sup> Straus and Machado, "Marcel's Notion of Incarnate Being," 127–128.

behind that appearance or with that appearance is a dignified body. The dignity of the human person extends to his whole being, which essentially includes the body.

We are able to relate with others and participate in the world because of our bodies. We are not just detached observers but participants in the world. However, even prior to our engagement with the world, we engaged first with our existential situation which is primordially rooted in our embodiment. Hence, more primordial than our cognition of the world is our participation through the feeling of our body in the world. Embodiment and its mode of feeling as participation is the foundation of our experience and existence in the world. In that case, we need to be always mindful of how we engage with our bodies and the world. Our bodies are our channel of actively participating in the world in a dignified way.

The body is an integral part of our human identity, an expression of our subjectivity, and a vital component of human relations. It is not a source of corruption, not just an object that can be used or manipulated for whatever purpose of the individual. In this sense, we have more reason to care for our body, not just our mind or soul. As the saying goes, *Mens sana in corpore sano*—"a healthy mind in a healthy body." This calls for caring for the self, which means caring for both body and mind. It means a life-long commitment to ensure holistic well-being of oneself, promote physical and mental health, prevention and management of illness. It means balancing mental pleasure and bodily needs to avoid unnecessary and stressful activities and controlling our selfish desires/practicing moderation—developing temperance and appreciating simple pleasures in life.

*Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Letters  
Center for Theology, Religious Studies, and Ethics  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

- Aguas, Jove Jim S., "Karol Wojtyła's Notion of the Body: Corporeality and Human Sexuality," paper presented in the *International Congress on Catholic and Corporeality*, (The University of Social and Media Culture, Torun, Poland, 24–25 November 2023).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Person, Action and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*, (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2014).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Filipino Value of Pakikipagkapwa-Tao Vis-À-Vis Gabriel Marcel's Notion of Creative Fidelity and Disponibilité," in

- Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts*, 5:2 (December 2016), 17–39.
- \_\_\_\_\_, “The Philosophical Foundation of John Paul II’s Notions of Marriage and Unity of Man and Woman in His Theology of the Body,” in *Philippiniana Sacra*, 55:164 (January–April 2020), 51–74.
- Aquinas, Thomas, *Contra Gentiles*, (New York: Hanover House, 1955–57).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (USA: Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947).
- Aristotle, *De Anima*, in Richard McKeon ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 535–606.
- Descartes, Rene, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. by John Veitch, in *The Classical Library* (2002), <<http://www.classicallibrary.org/descartes/principles/>>.
- Fei, Duoyi, “From ‘the mind isolated with the body’ to ‘the mind being embodied’: Contemporary Approaches to the Philosophy of the Body,” in *Cultures of Science*, 3:3 (September 2020), 206–219, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/2096608320960242>>.
- Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by Alan M. Sheridan (London/New York: Routledge, 1989).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The History of Madness*, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London/New York: Routledge, 2006).
- Gallagher, Kenneth, *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962).
- Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Mystery of Being I* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. by Manya Harari (New York: Citadel, 1995).
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962).
- Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892).
- Straus, Erwin & Michael Machado, “Marcel’s Notion of Incarnate Being,” in Paul Arthur Schilpp and Lewis Edwin Hahn ed., in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1984).
- Sweetman, Brendan ed., *A Gabriel Marcel Reader* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2011).

- \_\_\_\_\_, "Gabriel Marcel: Being and Having," in Michael Kuhnlein ed., *Philosophy of Religion and Critical Analysis of Religion: A Handbook* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2018), 564–576.
- Wojtyla, Karol, *Acting Person* (Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, USA; London, England: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1979).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Person: Subject and Community," in *Review of Metaphysics*, 33:2 (December 1979), 273–308.

## Simone Weil on Living in an Afflicted World

---

*Paula Nicole C. Eugenio*

**Abstract:** The contemporary time is being plagued with so many problems that seems to transcend the limits of the human psyche. News of war, suffering, and death seem to abound, and it looks like it will stay with us for a long time. But the question that we could ask: is this something new? Pain, suffering, and despair has been an intrinsic part of the human condition. It transcends every aspect of human existence, that we learn to live in an afflicted world—albeit in a way that becomes unnatural to us. Simone Weil was not a stranger when it comes to affliction—she wrote about it, and she lived with it until she died. She argued that affliction allows us to find meaning, resilience, and hope amidst all the suffering. I argue in this paper that Weil’s philosophy is a recognition that suffering as inherent in human existence should not be taken as a negative outlook on life or what I call fetishism of suffering; that it is not a cause of despair but is a call for an ethical engagement which emphasizes the importance of empathy and active involvement in alleviating the affliction, not just for the self, but for others too.

**Keywords:** Weil, affliction, attention, empathy

The present world—with the ever-developing technologies—is littered with many struggles, or dare I say, suffering. Although it is safe to assume that human life is never devoid of suffering, it is much evident that the kind of suffering today is much worse. It shows that as humans progresses, our desires become more complex, and thus leading to increased suffering. With the development and flourishing of nations, their desires and their want to be powerful become roots of the worsening affliction of the world. We can see it in the presence of war in Europe, the maritime tension among Asian nations, and of course the localized suffering brought about by many factors such as the worldwide inflation. Because of this, we can see people becoming desensitized and detached about this reality. People are divided into those who try to escape suffering and those who embrace it without really understanding the point of it—I call this *fetishism of suffering*.

Most often, people think of Simone Weil's concept of affliction as embracing this suffering fetishism, but I will argue that her acceptance of affliction is not a blind embracing of it, but really a starting point of attaining what we could call an attentive and empathic coexistence in this world. In the first part, I discuss the different dimensions of affliction and how it affects our lives. The second part is a discussion on cultivating attention. In this part, I argue that in the midst of the overwhelming presence of affliction, we need to have a strong commitment for attentive coexistence. This will be continued onto the next part as I discuss attention's maximum expression, which is love. I take love to mean empathy towards others which is essential to make sense of affliction and to lead us to a deeper sense of existence.

### **Affliction: The Void of the Soul**

Simone Weil acknowledges the importance of struggle in the development of the human person, as most existentialists do. The French term *malheur*, with affliction as the closest English translation, encapsulates her notion of despair. Affliction in the general sense of the term is about suffering—but this is not the kind of suffering that is commonly known—for it transcends physical and emotional pain. Affliction goes beyond physical pain, but it is inseparable from it. Weil maintains that it is distinct from simple suffering for it “takes possession of the soul and marks it through with its particular mark—the mark of slavery.”<sup>1</sup> When she speaks of slavery, she refers to the ancient Roman slavery, which is persisting until today in much complex forms, such as being slaves of money and of ideologies. Weil argues that all forms of slavery are inseparable from physical pain and suffering. She maintains that “affliction is an uprooting of life, a more or less weakened equivalent of death.”<sup>2</sup> It affects the whole life of a person in an indefinite period of time; it is unlike having migraine which passes after days or weeks, since we have no knowledge of how to cure affliction immediately. Unlike physical illnesses which we can bring to physicians for cure, affliction can pass us without noticing it. That the moment we understand that we have it, we have already become too entangled in it, that it feels impossible to get out of it alone, making us despair even more.

But what causes affliction? Where do we get this severe pain that marks our soul? Weil argues that though affliction is spiritual in nature, it is very much influenced by the social factors of existence. As she writes, “there is no true affliction unless every facet of human life is attacked: physical,

---

<sup>1</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 67.

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



social, and psychological.”<sup>3</sup> And she puts great emphasis on the essentiality of the social factor, as she writes: “there is not really affliction unless there is social degradation or the fear of it in some form or another.”<sup>4</sup> This is how affliction has become and it can be deduced that it has three dimensions: (1) social degradation or ostracism; (2) psychological torture wherein one sees herself as worthless; and (3) physical pain.<sup>5</sup>

In the first dimension, social degradation comes in many forms but oppression in terms of slavery and colonization best exemplify it. In discussing her concept of oppression, it is important to honor her Marxist influence. Indeed Karl Marx introduced Weil to the idea of oppression, but she makes a striking critique of Marx’s notion, pointing out that his is too limited between the social classes i.e., between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.<sup>6</sup> This oversight of the diverse types of oppression in Marx and his followers allows the communist to exploit and to get away from their oppressive ways which they argue is not oppression in the Marxist perspective.<sup>7</sup> This is where she tries to fill the gap on the general theory of oppression. She maintains that the notion of oppression transcends the field of economics and capitalism but it covers the whole civilization, “for it is oppression that has produced Hitler, wars, genocide, and many other social ills.”<sup>8</sup> This is evident in our civilization which is embedded with many kinds of oppressive forces which take matters in their own hands, and our history is littered with accounts of oppression—in all forms of it, such as social, political, and religious. And to say that this is a thing of the past is presumptuous, as we continuously experience it in the present day. For example, the racism that is prevalent not just in the West but also in many countries against other races or even nationalities in some cases; the sexism evident in our society; and the religious extremism against one another that is rampant all over the world.

The main thrust of Weil’s discussion on oppression is slavery. She maintains that from the dawn of civilization, human beings are already slaves. At the very moment of existence, one is already a slave of her desires. All her actions are motivated by the needs that she has.<sup>9</sup> The primitive people hunt and live according to the dictates of their biological needs such as food

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

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

<sup>5</sup> Henry Leroy Finch, *Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace*, ed. by Martin Andic (New York: Continuum, 2001), 63.

<sup>6</sup> Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. by Arthur Wills and John Petrie (London: Routledge, 2001), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Finch, *Intellect and Grace*, 63.

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

<sup>9</sup> Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, 75.

and shelter; and so are the present humans, but we have a more complex need compared to our ancestors. We are now motivated by money, by prestige.

The second aspect of affliction soon follows. After experiencing social degradation or ostracism, psychological torture follows. If we will take the case of the laborers in Marx, they feel this torture in a way that they will always equate their worth with their product. That due to this social degradation people will always feel as if they are worthless or that their worth is dependent upon certain variables and not innate as it should be. Weil has experienced this at a young age, having felt as if she is less worthy compared to her genius brother, as evident in one of her letters to Fr. Perrin.<sup>10</sup> The idea of being outside the kingdom of truth has given her an immense feeling of anxiety. But take into consideration the feeling of those who are uprooted by slavery, by colonization—these are more intense in nature, in a sense that they have no control over the things surrounding them and they have no power to change the things laid in front of them. “Colonization is the same as capitalism,”<sup>11</sup> they are both oppressive and they uproot people from their niche and produces lasting damage in the psyche of the people. Frantz Fanon describes the idea of the effects of colonialism in the chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* entitled, “Colonial War and Mental Disorder.” While he might not be directly influenced by Weil, he embodies the very notion that Weil is foreshadowing in her work. He maintains that “colonial war will go on, and for many years and many more to come, we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonialist onslaught.”<sup>12</sup> He argues that psychological disorders are ever present in any country which has been under a colonial power and this becomes a hindrance in making meaning—for making meaning involves knowing who one really is. He also maintains that colonialism does not only pertain to the systematic domination of people but “a systematized negation of the other, a determined denial of any attribute of humanity to the other; colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question ‘who am I in reality?’”<sup>13</sup> This is an unfortunate scenario in any life possible. Simone Weil writes, “a tree whose

---

<sup>10</sup> “At fourteen, I fell into one of those fits of bottomless despair that come with adolescence, and I seriously thought of dying because of the mediocrity of my natural faculties. The exceptional gifts of my brother, who had a childhood and youth comparable to those of Pascal, brought my own inferiority to me. I did not mind having no visible successes, but what did grieve me was the idea of being excluded from that transcendent kingdom to which only the truly great have access and wherein truth abides.” Weil, *Waiting for God*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Little, *Simone Weil on Colonialism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 181.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

roots are almost entirely eaten away falls at the first blow"<sup>14</sup> —she means to give emphasis on human beings' need to give importance to their own nature. To question their real identity is a symptom of the severity of their uprootedness.

The third aspect of affliction is physical pain. The psychological torture of not being good enough soon manifests itself as a physical pain. For example, a chest pain or an intense headache which becomes unbearable. But unlike ordinary physical pain, this cannot be remedied by simple medicine. For instance, Simone Weil has been plagued with intense headache her whole life and she equates it to the void that is in need of filling. This feeling of physical pain is what we may term as suffering and most of the time we have no idea what to do with such suffering that we endure. Some cope with it by extending it to others, as Weil argues that people do it because we think we gain something from it; that every time we do harm to others "we have gained in importance. We have expanded. We have filled an emptiness in ourselves by creating one in somebody else."<sup>15</sup> She maintains that:

Human mechanics: whoever is suffering seeks to communicate his suffering—either by ill-treating another or by provoking pity—so as to lessen it, and really does lessen it in this way. Where there is somebody who is absolutely inferior, with whom nobody commiserates, who is powerless to ill-treat any, his suffering remains inside him and poisons his existence.<sup>16</sup>

But for those who cannot do such projection, they resort to "attacking what the universe itself represents to them,"<sup>17</sup> which makes them mad at the world for "every good or beautiful thing becomes an insult."<sup>18</sup> Now the question stands: what then is the way to fill the void?

To make sense of suffering is a difficult task, what Weil suggests is for us to have the "strength to contemplate affliction when we are afflicted and to turn to the supernatural bread,"<sup>19</sup> that is for us to turn to God.

---

<sup>14</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind*, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.

<sup>15</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 122.

<sup>17</sup> Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 6.

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

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. See Weil, *Notebooks*, 157.

Affliction's supernatural and real cause is God's detachment from us and that left the void that we try so much to fill with our own capacity. This void makes it hard to love in whatever aspect it pertains. In God's absence, there is nothing to love, but when the soul ceases to love, God's absence becomes permanent.<sup>20</sup> In His absence, He inflicts us with affliction which becomes the true test of faith and of our soul's capacity to love. It is easy to love when all is good, when there is joy, and our souls are brimming with happiness. But with affliction present, to love is the greatest challenge. How is it possible to love if we feel empty? How is it possible to love if we feel like we are worthless? How do we love if we are under immense pain and suffering?<sup>21</sup>

That is the point of Weil's discussion of affliction—where do we find the capacity to love when we are downtrodden? Central to her argument is that God's love plays an important role in the unfolding of affliction. She argues that affliction is a “manual of Divine technique,”<sup>22</sup> which allows the introduction of the “finite creature's soul to the immensity of force, which is blind, brutal, and cold”<sup>23</sup>—which is humanity's reality.

### Cultivating Attention

As long as there are people using force for their mere selfishness oppression, violence, and suffering will always stay. With the presence of affliction everywhere, it is necessary to ask the question: what kind of response does seeing human suffering demand of us? Simone Weil's answer to this is the best yet the most difficult one—attention. She defines attention as the “rarest and purest form of generosity.”<sup>24</sup> As true as it is during her time, people tend to focus on themselves that thinking of others becomes a luxury. Whenever we think of the term attention, we always equate it with the word focus. When we attend to someone or something, we focus on them—we become present for them.<sup>25</sup> This is the very core of attention: *being present for the other*. It becomes the rarest and purest form of generosity not because we

---

<sup>20</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 70 and 79.

<sup>21</sup> Weil, *Notebooks*, 79.

<sup>22</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 81.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* See Eric Springsted, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 34.

<sup>24</sup> Simone Weil, *Seventy Letters* trans. by Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 2015), 136.

<sup>25</sup> Lisa McCullough, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil* (London: I.B Tauris, 2014), 70. “The French terms *attente* and *attendre* have all the connotation of ‘to wait’ in English. But it is also cognate with the term attention which connotes ‘to be present’ or ‘to listen to’.” See also, Peta Bowden, “Ethical Attention: Accumulating Understanding,” in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 6:1 (1998), 60.

give away tangible things, but because we give others our undivided time and presence. We give a part of ourselves that cannot be paid by money or any worldly matter; we give a part of ourselves that we cannot take back. Her life is a testament of this attentiveness towards others that somehow, she has forgotten to attend to her own needs.<sup>26</sup> This attentiveness helped in strengthening her conviction that self-centeredness will not help us attain the good that we are continuously searching for.

Mario von der Ruhr says that the concept of attention in Weil's philosophy is like Ariadne's thread as it is woven through every aspect of her thoughts.<sup>27</sup> As early as 1933–1934, she included the notion of attention in her lectures at the *lycée*. In the compiled *Lectures on Philosophy*, she discusses and differentiates two types of attention: spontaneous and voluntary attention.<sup>28</sup> She also maintains that these types of attention have their distinct symptoms, both physiological and psychological. Spontaneous attention is related to emotions such as grief and fear, which cannot be controlled, such as when one becomes overwhelmed by a sudden feeling of fear. It is characterized by the suspension of thinking about anything else besides the subject of emotion (psychological) and motionlessness and tension (physiological).<sup>29</sup> While voluntary attention is a higher form of attention, in such a way that one wills to focus on a subject. She relates it to education and prayer. For this kind of attention, the defining characteristics are when one does not allow oneself to think of anything else (psychological) and quietness (physiological).<sup>30</sup>

It is apparent that silence is a common symptom to the two types of attention. Silence should not be taken as the mere absence of sound but as an object of sensation.<sup>31</sup> It is in silence that we become aware of the things around us. It is in silence that we make sense of everything. But as human beings, we have the tendency to fear silence. We tend to think that silence will reveal to us the things that we are so much afraid to know and understand. This is why she emphasizes on attentive silence. She describes this as an important aspect of learning and of understanding the language of God, which she calls justice.

---

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Rebecca Rozelle-Stone, "Voiding Distraction: Simone Weil and the Religio-Ethics of Attention," (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2009), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>27</sup> Mario von der Ruhr, *Simone Weil: An Apprenticeship in Attention* (London: Continuum, 2006), 20.

<sup>28</sup> Simone Weil, *Lectures on Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Price (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 205.

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

<sup>30</sup> Weil, *Lectures*, 205.

<sup>31</sup> See Simone Weil, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Sian Miles (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 65.

She argues that every human being is capable of attention. But the capacity to be attentive seems to easily get lost in the sea of ambition and the prevalence of self-centeredness. This is the reason why she maintains that the cultivation of attention is both a social and moral obligation.<sup>32</sup> It is both a social and moral obligation for it involves treating the others the way they are meant to be treated. We have to become attentive of others in order for us to understand them and for us to give them the support that they need. The moral obligation is not just being there for them when they have no need for us, but precisely by being there when they are at their lowest; when they feel as though they are invisible and do not deserve any attention.

### Love as Empathy

Attention in its purest form or maximum form is love, but this love is not the kind that we naturally feel towards our significant others, family members, etc. This love that she speaks of is and should be a supernatural one; one that is rooted in God. Recall the commandment: thou shall love the Lord, thy God which Simone Weil maintains is a commandment not only when one comes to know God but also loving Him in his absence<sup>33</sup> and in our waiting. In His absence, our love must have an object, and that is what she called the different forms of implicit love of God.<sup>34</sup> The different forms of implicit love of God include: the love of our neighbor, the love of the order of the world, and the love of religious practices.

The first form is the love of our neighbor. The very essence of this love is justice. For Weil, justice and love are synonymous terms. To best explain this, she borrows examples from the Greek and Christian traditions.<sup>35</sup> The love of neighbor or justice is essential in our dealing with the afflicted, as it allows for the notion of compassion and gratitude to surface—both on the part of the afflicted and the other.<sup>36</sup> Gratitude drives one to an active faith in God, especially those who are afflicted—as it is hard to be grateful when nothing is going the way you envisioned it to go, and when everything is difficult.<sup>37</sup> She maintains that “gratitude on the part of the unfortunate is but

---

<sup>32</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, 57. See Christopher Hamilton, “Simone Weil’s Human Personality: Between the Personal and the Impersonal,” in *Harvard Theological Review*, 98:2 (2005), 194.

<sup>33</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 83.

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

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. “Christ does not call his benefactors loving or charitable. He calls them just. The Gospel makes no distinction between the love of our neighbor and justice.”

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

<sup>37</sup> Weil, *Notebooks*, 79.

a participation in the same virtue, for only she who is capable of it can recognize it. It is identical with the real, active faith in God.”<sup>38</sup>

This love for our neighbor allows us to see the invisible,<sup>39</sup> pertaining to what the society renders invisible: other’s suffering. The modern world has shaped people to be blind towards other people’s suffering and makes oneself the center of the universe. There are various factors which contribute to the phenomenon of rendering others’ suffering invisible. One prominent factor is the digital age, which has brought about a flood of information and an emphasis on personal online personas. In this digital landscape, it’s easy to become engrossed in one’s own world, crafting curated online identities that may not accurately represent our real-life empathy and concern for others. We are bombarded with constant distractions, news, and updates, often numbing our sensitivity to the pain and suffering experienced by those around us. Consumerism and materialism further exacerbate this issue. The pursuit of wealth, status, and possessions often leads individuals to prioritize their own desires and comfort above all else. In the relentless pursuit of success, we may inadvertently lose touch with the basic human emotions of empathy and compassion.

Moreover, the modern world’s individualistic values and the pressure to constantly improve one’s own life can create a tunnel vision where we focus primarily on our own needs, desires, and achievements. The result is a society that, at times, seems to have lost sight of the suffering of others. It is precisely in this context that the idea of loving our neighbor takes on even greater significance. By actively practicing empathy and compassion, we can begin to break down these barriers that isolate us from the suffering of others. She also maintains that people have been misinterpreting the expression “to love our neighbor in God” or “for God,” as if we only have to do it because of the fear to offend God and to win His favor. She argues that:

These expressions are misleading. It is not the time to turn our thoughts in God. Just as there are times when we must think of God, and forget all creatures, we do not think explicitly of God. At such times, the presence of God in us has as its condition a secret so deep that it is even a secret from us.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

To love others just because we want God to reward us is not true love.<sup>41</sup> It is an illusion that does not provide any consolation. What true love looks like is when we consent to God to love the afflicted through us; she maintains “compassion and gratitude come down from God... the sufferer and the other love each other, starting from God, through God, but not for the love of God; they love each other for the love of one for the other.”<sup>42</sup> Love for the other is love in itself but through the agency of God.

The second form of implicit love of God is the love of the order of the world. This pertains to the love that we have of the beauty of the universe; “by loving the order of the world we imitate the divine love which created the universe of which we are a part of.”<sup>43</sup> Through this form of love, God allows us to have a glimpse of how He created the world; we are not co-creators *per se*, but by giving us the creative imagination wherein we imagine ourselves like God as a creator of the universe, and just like God, we are expected to renounce this notion of being the center of the universe. She writes:

We love in a world of unreality and dreams. To give up our imaginary position as the creator, to renounce it, not only intellectually but in the imaginative part of the soul, that means to awaken to what is real and eternal, to see the true light and hear the true silence.<sup>44</sup>

In detaching ourselves from the notion of centrality, we are allowed to truly pay attention to the real beauty of the world. In our present time, when affliction is ever-present; where love seems to fade in the face of war, famine, and travesty, “the beauty of the world is almost the only way we can allow God to penetrate our souls.”<sup>45</sup> It is the easiest way for God to open our souls to consent to His presence. But it also allows us to face our greatest trouble—we are always inclined to “eat when we are only supposed to look.”<sup>46</sup> In this implicit form of God’s love, we are challenged to look and appreciate the world without desiring to possess it. It is through the love for

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. “He who gives bread to the famished sufferer for the love God will not be thanked by Christ. He has already had his reward in this thought itself. Christ thanks those who do not know to whom they are giving food.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 105. See also Ann Pirucello, “Interpreting Simone Weil: Presence and Absence in Attention,” in *Philosophy East and West*, 45:1 (January 1995), 61–72; and Michelle Bouldous Walker, “Eating Ethically: Emmanuel Levinas and Simone Weil,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76:2 (2002), 295–320.



God's creation that we yearn to know Him more. The love for the order of things allows us to live in the present—loving it means loving the world we are in and not the product of our imagination. Whenever we love the imagined world, “we run the risk of thinking values are easy but easy values are of little merit.”<sup>47</sup> An imagined world gives us an imagined value that does not give us any more room to grow. We need real values in order to understand the true love of God.

To love the order of the universe is to love the real. To seek this beauty outside the natural capacity of an individual becomes a vice. We have to exert our attention to the real beauty in order for us to remain true to the very essence of knowing beauty, not just for the immediate gratification of the senses. Since if we fall in the trap of consuming the world, we are forfeiting our responsibilities to the world and become givers of affliction. As she writes:

Actually, the more they have the form of a nation, the more they claim to be countries themselves, the more distorted and soiled they are as images. But to destroy cities, thrusting them down to the state of social outcasts, this is to sever every bond of poetry and love between human beings and the universe. It is to plunge them forcibly into the horror of ugliness.<sup>48</sup>

The love for the order of things requires us to pay attention to how we interact with the world, as even the smallest improperly thought action could result to irreparable damage to the world and in turn to other people.

## Conclusion

Having shown the interrelationship of affliction and attention, it would be safe to say that Weil is not calling for a fetishism of suffering. She is merely telling us that we can, and we have, to make sense of the affliction that we are embracing. It should not be an empty embrace to the point that it does not lead to anything other than itself. Weil's acceptance of affliction is not the end goal, but really a step toward an empathic coexistence in the world—forging relationships with others founded on care and compassion. Her emphasis on attention, especially towards those who are suffering and those who have been deemed unworthy of help, challenges us to re-evaluate

---

<sup>47</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 114.

<sup>48</sup> Weil, *Waiting for God*, 116–117.

our perspectives, especially in this current time. As we wrestle with affliction, are we still capable of paying attention to others, or have we become too preoccupied by our own affliction that we forget others already?

*Department of Philosophy  
The Graduate School  
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

- Bowden, Peta, "Ethical Attention: Accumulating Understanding," in *European Journal of Philosophy*, 6:1 (1998), 59-77.
- Christopher Hamilton, "Simone Weil's Human Personality: Between the Personal and the Impersonal," in *Harvard Theological Review*, 98:2 (2005), 187-207.
- Fanon, Frantz, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2005).
- Finch, Henry Leroy, *Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace*, ed. by Martin Andic (New York: Continuum, 2001).
- Little, J.P., *Simone Weil on Colonialism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).
- McCullough, Lisa, *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil* (London: I.B Tauris, 2014).
- Pirucello, Ann, "Interpreting Simone Weil: Presence and Absence in Attention," in *Philosophy East and West*, 45:1 (January 1995), 61-72.
- Rozelle-Stone, Adrian Rebecca, "Voiding Distraction: Simone Weil and the Religio-Ethics of Attention," (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2009).
- Springsted, Eric, *Simone Weil and the Suffering of Love* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010).
- von der Ruhr, Mario, *Simone Weil: An Apprenticeship in Attention* (London: Continuum, 2006).
- Walker, Michelle Boulous, "Eating Ethically: Emmanuel Levinas and Simone Weil," in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76:2 (2002), 295-320.
- Weil, Simone, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Lectures on Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Price (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. by Arthur Wills and John Petrie (London: Routledge, 2001).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Seventy Letters*, trans. by Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. by Sian Miles (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind*, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2002).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, trans. by Arthur Wills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

## Structural Violence in the Philippines and Freedom and Responsibility in Simone de Beauvoir's Moral Philosophy

---

*Zhea Katrina R. Estrada*

**Abstract:** This paper reads the Philippine socio-political context of the Duterte administration (2016-2022)—focusing primarily with the war on drugs and the facilitation of the Marcoses' return—guided by de Beauvoir's freedom and responsibility in her *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. To claim that Filipinos' political tragedies are simply the result of being victims of the system (bad faith) is a misguided idea, for one cannot disregard the Dutertes' and the Marcoses' agency and accountability for their choices and thus should be held liable for human rights violations. The paper is divided into three parts. First is a discussion about structural violence in the Philippines, focusing on state-sponsored oppression (e.g., the war on drugs). The second part is freedom and responsibility based on Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy. For Simone de Beauvoir, our greatest imperative is to create our life's meaning while protecting the freedom of others to do the same. This brings us to the third part, where we explore how recognizing and assuming our freedom and responsibility can overcome the conditions of oppression. Ultimately, in using Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy to analyze the Philippine context, this research shows that her contribution to philosophy remains relevant and goes beyond feminism.

**Keywords:** de Beauvoir, freedom, oppression, structural violence

It has been almost a decade since the former mayor of Davao City, Rodrigo Duterte, became the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the Philippines. Duterte poised himself as the “The Punisher” of anyone who dared to violate law and order, promising to go after corrupt politicians and criminals should he win the presidency in 2016. “If elected president, give me about three to six months, I will get rid of corruption, drugs and criminality,” he said in his

campaign rally in Batac City, Ilocos Norte<sup>1</sup>—the bulwark of dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr, whose son and namesake, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr, succeeded the presidency after Duterte. In his final presidential campaign rally in Manila, Duterte warned, “If I make it to the presidential palace, I will do just as I did as mayor. You drug pushers, hold-up men and do-nothings, you better go out. Because, I’d kill you.”<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to 16 million Filipinos, the promise was somehow fulfilled, albeit not within three to six months. By the end of Duterte’s term in 2022, at least 6,252 individuals were killed in police operations related to the anti-drug flagship campaign of the administration, not including the victims of vigilante-style killings estimated at 27,000 to 30,000 by human rights groups.<sup>3</sup> In 2017, Duterte was regarded as the Person of the Year in Organized Crime and Corruption for enabling “extrajudicial killings, endorsing vigilantism, and systemic violations of human rights” by the investigative journalism organization Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP).<sup>4</sup> Corruption also remained. Three days before leaving the highest position of the land, Duterte admitted that “corruption cannot be stopped, only minimized.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite being ruthless to anyone involved with drugs, Duterte had a soft spot for the Marcoses during his term, citing that he owed Imee Marcos, daughter of Marcos Sr, for financing the presidential campaign, which she denied. Accordingly, Duterte promised Imee that if he won, Marcos Sr would be given a hero’s burial and laid at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (Heroes’ Cemetery).<sup>6</sup> Five months after Duterte was sworn in as president, Marcos Sr was finally laid to rest at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* despite the protests of human rights groups and survivors and families of the victims of Martial Law. The administration justified the burial, saying Filipinos should forgive

---

<sup>1</sup> Ariel Paolo Tejada, “Duterte Vows to End Criminality in 3 Months,” in *Philstar* (16 May 2016), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/02/20/1555349/duterte-vows-end-criminality-3-months>>.

<sup>2</sup> Manny Mogato et al., “Blood and Benefits: Duterte Imposes His Formula on the Philippines,” in *Reuters* (28 December 2016), <<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/philippines-davao-model/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Jodesz Gavilan, “Duterte’s Violent War on Drugs, as Recorded by Rights Groups, Int’l Bodies,” in *Rappler* (20 July 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/list-reports-documentation-rodrigo-duterte-drug-war-killings/>>.

<sup>4</sup> Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Rodrigo Duterte,” in *OCCRP* (2017), <<https://www.occrp.org/en/person-of-the-year/rodrigo-duterte>>.

<sup>5</sup> Azer Parrocha, “Corruption Can’t Be Stopped, Only Minimized: Duterte,” in *Philippine News Agency* (27 June 2022), <<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1177652>>.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Lourdes Viray, “Duterte Admits Being Indebted to Imee Marcos,” in *Philstar* (29 December 2016), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/12/29/1657805/duterte-admits-being-indebted-imee-marcos>>.

and “move on” since decades have already passed.<sup>7</sup> This significantly contributed to the redemption of the Marcos family name that boosted Bongbong Marcos Jr’s presidential campaign in 2022.<sup>8</sup>

Both Duterte and Marcos Jr largely owe their presidency to online disinformation. The May 2016 Philippine presidential election results reflected how online political disinformation can shape electoral outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Filipino Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa labeled the May 2016 elections as the “first social media elections” which employed a “death by a thousand cuts” strategy by “chipping at facts, using half-truths that fabricate an alternative reality by merging the power of bots and fake accounts on social media to manipulate real people.”<sup>10</sup> The Philippines was “patient zero for the war on disinformation,” according to Facebook Global Politics and Government Outreach Director Katie Harbath.<sup>11</sup> Marcos Jr used the same method when he ran for the presidency in 2022 and pushed certain narratives rooted in false nostalgia and portrayed their family as the victim of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution to gain sympathy and votes from the people.<sup>12</sup> According to Tsek.ph, a fact-checking initiative group, “as of April 30, 2022 [sic], 92% of fact checks about Marcos were false or misleading information in his favor. The proportion of debunked false claims praising Duterte was even higher at 95%.”<sup>13</sup>

It is easy to claim that Filipinos are only victims of a “relentless stream of disinformation” in multiple formats and platforms.<sup>14</sup> Based on a Social

---

<sup>7</sup> Randolph S. David, “Populism and the Continuing Allure of Authoritarianism in the Philippines,” in Edilberto C. De Jesus and Ivyrose S. Baysic eds., *Martial Law in the Philippines: Lessons and Legacies, 1972–2022* (Quezon City: Bughaw, 2023), 62–80.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Beltran, “How a ‘Tsunami of Disinformation’ Helped Marcos Jr Win Back Power,” in *Al Jazeera* (29 June 2022), <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/29/disinformation-reigns-in-philippines-as-marcos-jr-takes-top-job>>.

<sup>9</sup> CMFR, “Government’s Role in the Spread of Disinformation,” in *CMFR* (14 April 2023), <<https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/government-s-role-in-the-spread-of-disinformation/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Maria Ressa, “Propaganda War: Weaponizing the Internet,” in *Rappler* (18 May 2023), <https://www.rappler.com/philippines/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet/>.

<sup>11</sup> CMFR, “Government’s Role in the Spread of Disinformation.”

<sup>12</sup> CMFR, “Marcos Follows Duterte’s Model of Disinformation,” in *CMFR* (14 April 2023), <<https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/marcos-follows-dutertes-model-of-disinformation/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Noriega Richa, “Tsek.Ph: 92% of False Info Favorable to Marcos, 96% of Disinformation vs Robredo Negative,” in *GMA News Online* (7 May 2022), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/830939/tsek-ph-92-of-false-info-favorable-to-marcos-96-of-disinformation-vs-robredo-negative/story/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Yvonne T Chua, Maria Diosa Labiste, and Felipe Jose Gonzales, “Filipino Voters Were Engulfed in Relentless Stream of Disinformation,” feature story, *University of the Philippines* (11 May 2022), <<https://up.edu.ph/filipino-voters-were-engulfed-in-relentless-stream-of-disinformation/>>.

Weather Stations (SWS) survey<sup>15</sup> conducted in December 2021, 51% of Filipinos find it difficult to identify fake news on television, radio, or social media.<sup>16</sup> Non-elementary graduates (59%) find it more difficult to spot fake news, followed by elementary graduates (58%), junior high school graduates (48%), and college graduates (43%).<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, those who said they often spot fake news are highest among college graduates (26%), junior high school graduates (23%), elementary graduates (17%), and non-elementary graduates (13%).<sup>18</sup> When asked about their perception of how serious of a problem online fake news is, the results were highest among college graduates (75%) and junior high school graduates (74%), followed by elementary graduates (59%) and non-elementary graduates (48%).<sup>19</sup> These numbers, in a way, indicate that education affects how we view facts and lies.

However, the view that Filipinos are only victims removes our agency. The question of agency arises when considering how much control we have over our identities in the face of cultural and social influences. If our essence is something we create through our choices, how much of this process is genuinely free and shaped by external forces? French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir suggests that while our environment profoundly influences us, we also possess the capacity for radical freedom. In other words, we can resist and redefine these influences. Yet, it is important to note that this freedom comes with responsibility—that we must take ownership of our actions, acknowledging that our freedom is intertwined with the freedom of others. Hence, for Simone de Beauvoir, our greatest imperative is to create our life's meaning while protecting the freedom of others to do the same.

This paper has three parts: 1) structural violence in the Philippines as manifested by state-sponsored oppression, such as the war on drugs; 2) freedom and responsibility according to Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy; and 3) how recognizing and assuming our freedom and responsibility can overcome the conditions of oppression. Ultimately, in using Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy to analyze the Philippine

---

<sup>15</sup> Social Weather Stations, "Social Weather Stations: Fourth Quarter 2021 Social Weather Survey: 69% of Adult Filipinos Say the Problem of Fake News in Media Is Serious," in *Social Weather Stations* (25 February 2022), <[https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisplay/?artcsyscode=ART-20220225130129&mc\\_cid=368bdea2b7](https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisplay/?artcsyscode=ART-20220225130129&mc_cid=368bdea2b7)>.

<sup>16</sup> The survey was done through face-to-face interviews with 1,440 adults—360 each in Balance Luzon, Metro Manila, the Visayas, and Mindanao. The sampling error margins are  $\pm 2.6\%$  for national percentages and  $\pm 5.2\%$  for Balance Luzon, Metro Manila, the Visayas, and Mindanao.

<sup>17</sup> Loreben Tuquero, "51% of Filipinos Find It Difficult to Spot Fake News on Media – SWS," in *Rappler* (26 February 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/sws-survey-fake-news-december-2021/>>.

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

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

context, this article shows that her contribution to philosophy remains relevant and goes beyond feminism.

### Structural Violence in the Philippines

“Your concern is human rights, mine is human lives.”<sup>20</sup> It was 23 July 2018, Rodrigo Duterte’s third State of the Nation Address (SONA), at the House of Representatives, Batasang Pambansa. Two years into the presidency, the rhetoric has not changed: the country is still riddled with drugs, and anyone involved with it must die. Almost everyone in the venue applauded and cheered when Duterte delivered this famous line directed to human rights advocates and church leaders. For Duterte, human rights meant “giving Filipinos, especially those at the society’s fringes, a decent and dignified future through the social and physical infrastructures necessary to better their lives.”<sup>21</sup> He continues, “You worry about the present; I am concerned [about] both the present and the future. I worry about the future because I know what crimes can do to the youth of this country. If not stopped, crimes can make human cesspools of succeeding generations. I will not allow it to happen. Not during my term.”<sup>22</sup> A touching but firm statement comparable to how a father disciplines his child. Indeed, Rodrigo Duterte, “Tatay (Father) Digong” to his supporters, loves the country and cares about the welfare of Filipinos to the point of waging a bloody war against anyone who tries to destroy our future. He also encouraged everyone to help him. In his inauguration speech on 30 June 2016, he said, “If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, aren’t the addicts, users, and pushers Filipinos too?

*Oplan* (operational plan) *Tokhang*, or simply *Tokhang*, is the Duterte administration’s anti-drug campaign. It is a portmanteau of *toktok* (knock) and *hangyo* (plead). The idea was to knock at the doors of those who have connections to illegal substances and plead with them to change their lives or else face grave sanctions. In reality, the police did not knock nor plead. Even if they knocked, anyone who opened the door on the other side would be met with gunshots—those who refuse to let the authorities in get their doors

---

<sup>20</sup> Rodrigo Duterte, “Full Text: President Duterte’s 2018 State of the Nation Address,” in *Rappler* (23 July 2018), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/207989-rodrigo-duterte-sona-2018-philippines-speech/>>.

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

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

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, “Over 7,000 People Killed in Six Months in Philippines ‘War on Drugs,’” in *Amnesty International UK* (18 May 2020), <<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/philippines-president-duterte-war-on-drugs-thousands-killed>>.



broken and get more gunshots.<sup>24</sup> The Philippine National Police (PNP) admitted that they had killed 6,500 individuals in the name of the drug war.<sup>25</sup> The Human Rights Watch, however, estimates that the death toll could be around 23,983.<sup>26</sup> Many of the victims of the drug war are the poor, and the extrajudicial killings were usually carried out in urban poor communities. It became normal to find lifeless bodies on the streets, sometimes their faces wrapped in duct tape and most of the time carrying a piece of cardboard saying “*Pusher/Adik ako. Huwag tularan.* (I am a [drug] pusher/addict. Do not emulate.)”<sup>27</sup>

Former Vice President Leni Robredo also criticized the Duterte administration and called the operation a “war against the poor.”<sup>28</sup> Despite this, the poor remain “really polarized and conflicted” about the drug war.<sup>29</sup> They feel that “their communities have become safer, and they are thankful for it,” regardless of whether some of their relatives and neighbors were killed under *Tokhang*.<sup>30</sup> For them, putting food on the table, education, health, inflation, and jobs are more important than human rights.<sup>31</sup> Let Tatay Digong do his job—at least he is doing something—a good father protects his children from anyone who might hurt them. Kill them, even if they are our friends and family.

### *We are all victims (?)*

Duterte had warned us three months before he won the May 2016 elections: “If I become president, it will be bloody because we’ll order the killing of all criminals, the drug addicts and the drug lords.”<sup>32</sup> Many thought it was only a figure of speech intended to set him apart from other candidates.

---

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Berehulak, “They Are Slaughtering Us Like Animals,” in *The New York Times* (7 December 2016), <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/07/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-drugs-killings.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> Asia News Network, “What Is Oplan Tokhang and Why Is It in the News?,” in *Asia News Network* (20 November 2019), <<https://asianews.network/what-is-oplan-tokhang-and-why-is-it-in-the-news/>>.

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

<sup>27</sup> Raffy Lerma, “Dead Serious,” in *Raffy Lerma* (24 December 2016), <<https://www.raffylemma.com/blog-1>>.

<sup>28</sup> Asia News Network, “What Is Oplan Tokhang.”

<sup>29</sup> Janella Paris, “Duterte and the Poor: What the Surveys Say,” in *Rappler* (30 June 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/234195-analysis-public-surveys-about-duterte-from-2016-2019/>>.

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

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

<sup>32</sup> Iris Gonzales, “Duterte’s Drug War Threatens Philippine Democracy,” in *New Internationalist* (5 July 2017), <<https://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2016/09/15/dutertes-drug-war-threatens-philippine-democracy>>.

How will it be possible when we have laws that ensure our rights? On the eve of the election day, more than 300,000 people who attended Duterte's final presidential campaign rally in Manila witnessed his declaration that we should "forget the laws on human rights."<sup>33</sup> The crowd erupted in cheer. Duterte kept his promise.

As a consolation, Filipinos have been told by Duterte and his supporters that "if you have done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear".<sup>34</sup> Yet stories of those left behind by the victims tell otherwise. For Duterte, the killing of innocent people related to the drug war is neither a crime, negligence, or recklessness, but rather, collateral damage.<sup>35</sup> Those who had decided to change their lives and stopped using or selling drugs were not exempted, either. Michael Siaron, one of the first victims of the extrajudicial killings under the drug war, had long stopped using drugs, according to his partner Jennilyn Olayres, as they had dreams for a better life.<sup>36</sup> On 23 July 2016, not even a month after Duterte's inauguration, Jennilyn found Michael's lifeless body along EDSA Rotonda in Pasay City. Masked men on a motorcycle and three bullet shots took Michael's life while he was trying to earn money for dinner by driving a *pedicab* (cycle rickshaw).<sup>37</sup> "*Hindi ba kayo naawa? Hindi ba kayo naawa sa patay?* (Have you no pity? Do you not feel sorry for the dead?)," Jennilyn addressed the crowd while weeping and cradling her dead partner.<sup>38</sup>

Pity was not enough to change minds. Bodies kept piling up the longer Duterte stayed in power. The violence was justified "to preserve the interest of the next generation"<sup>39</sup>—a generation clueless about what was happening in the present and whose existence is still in limbo, making it impossible for them to have an interest that must be preserved.

The following year, on 16 August 2017, 17-year-old high school student Kian delos Santos was murdered by the police.<sup>40</sup> Kian pleaded for his

---

<sup>33</sup> Mogato et al., "Blood and Benefits."

<sup>34</sup> Gemmo Fernandez, "International Efforts to Hold Duterte to Account Yield Anger from the Philippine Government," in *East Asia Forum* (4 August 2021), <<https://eastasiaforum.org/2021/08/04/international-efforts-to-hold-duterte-to-account-yield-anger-from-the-philippine-government/>>.

<sup>35</sup> Kristine Phillips, "Duterte Has a Name for Innocent People Killed in the Philippines' Drug War: Collateral Damage," in *The Washington Post* (18 October 2016), <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/18/duterte-has-a-name-for-innocent-people-killed-in-the-philippines-drug-war-collateral-damage/>>.

<sup>36</sup> Lerma, "Dead Serious."

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

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

<sup>39</sup> Phillips, "Duterte Has a Name of Innocent People."

<sup>40</sup> Jessica Bartolome, "The Kian Delos Santos Case: A Timeline," in *GMA News Online* (29 November 2018), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/specials/content/24/the-kian-delos-santos-case-a-timeline/>>.

life, “*Tama na po, may exam pa ako bukas* (Please stop, I still have an exam tomorrow).”<sup>41</sup> They ignored him, and the following day, Kian’s lifeless body was found at a dead-end in their neighborhood in Caloocan City. The four police officers involved claimed that Kian shot at them as he allegedly had a caliber .45 gun and two sachets of suspected shabu.<sup>42</sup> In other words, it was a case of *nanlaban* (fought back), forcing the police to fire back. Sixteen witnesses came forward to debunk the story given by the police. For the supporters of the drug war, the police did nothing wrong. It was self-defense against a teenager who could never take his exams and hope for a brighter future.

Yet this violence is more profound than it seems. It is structural. According to American anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer, structural violence is a “broad rubric that includes a host of offensives against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequality, and the more spectacular forms of violence that are unwontedly human rights abuses, some of their punishment for efforts to escape structural violence.”<sup>43</sup> The victims are not random, too. The poor “are the chief victims of structural violence... because such suffering is ‘structured’ by historically given (often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire—whether through routine, ritual, or as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life—to constrain agency... for many choices both large and small are limited by... sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty.”<sup>44</sup>

*Tokhang* is not as simple as killing the innocent and disregarding human rights. “Human rights violations are not accidents; they are not random distribution or effect. Rights violations are, rather, symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are linked intricately to the social conditions that so often determine who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm.”<sup>45</sup> Those of us who possess more privileges (e.g., money, social status, higher level of education, connections to those in power, etc.) have something to cushion the blows of structural violence. We do not have to wonder how to pay for the next meal, how to get to work if jeepneys are phased out, or worry about paying PHP 625 for a health permit when the minimum wage is only PHP 645. Because our basic needs can be satisfied by our privileges,

---

<sup>41</sup> Edu Punay, “Kian Begged for His Life before Cops Shot Him,” in *Philstar.com* (3 October 2017), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/03/1745309/kian-begged-his-life-cops-shot-him>>.

<sup>42</sup> Bartolome, “The Kian Delos Santos Case.”

<sup>43</sup> Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Structural Violence and the Assault on Human Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

focusing on self-actualization and having conversations or writing papers about human rights is easy.

Such is not the case for the poor, who must devise ingenious ways, which could sometimes be illegal (*pagkapit sa patalim*), to ensure daily survival. Prostitution, petty crimes, and engaging in illegal drug trade can be considered as *paggawa ng paraan* (making a way) to survive— “an entitlement, a right to do even if it comes in conflict with the law.”<sup>46</sup> Then many of us tell them that they are the scum of the earth for trying to find a living, that it is their fault that they are poor because they are lazy, and that they are nothing but a burden to society. Because they violate the law, especially those with connections to illegal drugs, they deserve to die. “These sons of whores are destroying our children. I warn you, don’t go into that, even if you’re a policeman, because I will really kill you,” Duterte said.<sup>47</sup> The blame is put on individuals instead of addressing the root causes of why people find it necessary to do something illegal.

What many do not realize is our decisions are largely shaped by our facticity or “those aspects of human lives which we cannot choose either for or against and which constitute the human condition”<sup>48</sup> —the inescapable facts of our existence, such as our bodies, past experiences, and the circumstances into which we are born. These factors impose limits on what we can achieve and shape our opportunities. Thus, the decisions of the poor can be considered as products of abject poverty that they did not choose. This is not an excuse for illegal and immoral actions nor a claim that we are only victims of our circumstances, as it would reduce us into beings without agency. On the other hand, we also possess transcendence or freedom to imagine, aspire, and strive for what is possible beyond these limits.

## Freedom and Responsibility in Simone de Beauvoir’s Moral Philosophy

In the same way we can choose to commit something wrong and illegal, we can also choose to do the right thing. What a privileged thing to say and easier said than done. Some philosophies, like determinism,

---

<sup>46</sup> Efenita May M. Taqueban, “A Way Out in Eden: Maternal Health Crisis in Manila,” in *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, 65:2 (2013), 28.

<sup>47</sup> The Guardian, “Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte Urges People to Kill Drug Addicts,” in *The Guardian* (1 July 2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/01/philippines-president-rodrigo-duterte-urges-people-to-kill-drug-addicts>>.

<sup>48</sup> Marguerite La Caze, “Simone de Beauvoir: Freedom and the Scandal of Death,” in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* 21:1 (15 November 2005), 145, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-02101015>>.

emphasize the inescapability of facticity, denying the role of human agency and freedom. Conversely, utopian or idealistic visions of human freedom ignore the constraints of facticity, imagining a world where individuals are entirely self-determining. For Simone de Beauvoir, human existence is neither wholly determined nor wholly free but both. Balancing facticity and transcendence is the challenge of human existence.

Simone de Beauvoir, although widely known for feminism exemplified in her work *The Second Sex* (1949),<sup>49</sup> explored the themes of freedom, responsibility, and morality in her earlier work *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.<sup>50</sup> Her existentialist philosophy offers profound insights into the nature of freedom and oppression, rooted in the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. She argues that the human condition is ambiguous: “We are both lonely and connected to each other, a unique subject and an object for others, consciousness and body, free and unfree.”<sup>51</sup> To be authentic means to understand that disclosure—a paradoxical operation in that one is always uprooting oneself from the world one remains rooted in<sup>52</sup>—is recognizing one’s freedom and responsibility and rejecting absolute truths or ends.<sup>53</sup>

Unlike Jean-Paul Sartre, who saw human beings as isolated individuals,<sup>54</sup> de Beauvoir claimed that we are interdependent, involved in networks of relationships determined by socio-historical situations, and the other must not be considered a hindrance to my freedom but a condition allowing my freedom to be realized.<sup>55</sup> As such, authenticity is achieved in interhuman relationships by seeing others as free subjects.<sup>56</sup> There is no ethics without freedom because human actions are meaningful only insofar as they express freedom. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir explores freedom as central to human morality. Freedom is not simply the absence of constraints but an active process of creating meaning and shaping the world through our

---

<sup>49</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Sheila Malovany-Chevallier and Constance Borde (London: Vintage Classic, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York, New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, “Simone de Beauvoir’s Ethics and Its Relation to Current Moral Philosophy,” in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 14:1 (25 November 1997), 39, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-01401006>>.

<sup>52</sup> Kristana Arp, “The Joys of Disclosure: Simone De Beauvoir and the Phenomenological Tradition,” ed. by Anna Tymieniecka, in *Analecta Husserliana*, LXXXVIII (2005): 393–406.

<sup>53</sup> Lundgren-Gothlin, “Simone de Beauvoir’s Ethics and Its Relation to Current Moral Philosophy,” 40.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, trans. by Hazel E Barnes (New York, New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Lundgren-Gothlin, “Simone de Beauvoir’s Ethics and Its Relation to Current Moral Philosophy,” 40.

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

choices. However, interhuman relationships can lead to either freedom or oppression.

To fully assume our freedom, we must also recognize the freedom of others. Oppression occurs when one person or group denies the freedom of another, reducing them to objects rather than treating them as subjects with their own capacity for self-determination. Oppression is a result of fearful individuals—such as dictators or tyrants—who cannot face the ambiguity of existence and instead seek to control others in an attempt to create a false sense of security and power. For de Beauvoir, if the oppressed are denied a future and are no more than physically “perpetuating itself,” then “living is only not dying, and human existence is indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation.”<sup>57</sup>

It could also happen that the oppressed fail to recognize their situation and their own freedom. One of the signs of the depth of oppression is the inability to recognize being oppressed.<sup>58</sup> De Beauvoir, following Marxist ideas, uses the term “mystification” to describe how oppressive systems create false consciousness, leading the oppressed to internalize their subjugation.<sup>59</sup> This internalized oppression, or what we now call internalized sexism, racism, or classism, keeps individuals from realizing their own freedom. The oppressed may even desire their own oppression as they come to accept their situation as natural or inevitable. Yet, as de Beauvoir notes, the drive for freedom persists even under the heaviest oppression.

Therefore, in de Beauvoir’s moral philosophy, the primary aim is to transform abstract freedom into moral freedom. This transformation requires recognizing our own freedom and that of others, actively participating in the liberation of ourselves and others, and rejecting all forms of oppression. To convert freedom into moral freedom, one must assume the responsibility to make choices that affirm freedom for oneself and others. Denying our own freedom or the freedom of others leads to “bad faith,” in which individuals deceive themselves about their potential for freedom and ethical responsibilities.<sup>60</sup>

Existentialism, in this sense, is an ethics of responsibility, urging us to recognize the impact of our choices on ourselves and the world and people

---

<sup>57</sup> Sonia Kruks, “Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom,” in *Social Text*, 17 (1987), 112, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/466482>>.

<sup>58</sup> Gail Weiss, “Freedom, Oppression and the Possibilities of Ethics for Simone de Beauvoir,” in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 18:1 (25 November 2002), 14, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-01801003>>.

<sup>59</sup> Ian M. Sullivan, “Simone de Beauvoir and Confucian Role Ethics: Role-relational Ambiguity and Confucian Mystification,” in *Hypatia*, 31:3 (2016), 624, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12262>>.

<sup>60</sup> La Caze, “Simone de Beauvoir,” 144.

around us. For de Beauvoir, freedom is an intrinsic part of human existence, yet it is not merely a state but a process. It is not something we achieve once and for all, but a journey, a constant becoming. It follows the existentialist dogma that “existence precedes essence,” meaning we are not born with a predefined nature or purpose. This means we must constantly strive toward a self-defined future yet never fully achieve completeness because our freedom is ongoing and undefined. Human identity is always a work in progress, and we are free to create ourselves through our choices and relationships with others. However, this freedom comes with anxiety because it confronts us with the infinite possibilities of existence. This reaffirms our ambiguity: being a subject, capable of projecting ourselves into the future and shaping our destiny, and being an object constrained by the material and social conditions of the world.

“A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied,” de Beauvoir writes.<sup>61</sup> True freedom, for de Beauvoir, involves the responsibility of transcending one’s immediate circumstances and contributing to the freedom of others, creating a more open and just future for all.

### Overcoming Oppression

“The only solution to oppression is rebellion,” de Beauvoir argues.<sup>62</sup> In rebelling, we should not force freedom on others but rather provide how they can free themselves by helping people to gain material means and a political voice.<sup>63</sup> This process of empowerment requires rejecting the oppressor’s objectification and asserting one’s subjectivity. However, de Beauvoir acknowledges that in some cases, the oppressed may need to temporarily objectify the oppressor to dismantle the structures of domination. Violence, she argues, may sometimes be necessary as a last resort when no other means of achieving freedom are available.<sup>64</sup> Yet, she warns against making violence a principle, stressing that the goal should always be to recognize the freedom of others and build a future in which all can live freely. Oppressors must come to recognize the freedom of those they oppress, acknowledging the inherent ambiguity of human existence. This recognition leads to an ethical life where individuals strive to extend their own freedom through the freedom of others.

---

<sup>61</sup> De Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 91.

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

<sup>63</sup> La Caze, “Simone de Beauvoir,” 150.

<sup>64</sup> Lori J. Marso, “Simone de Beauvoir on Violence and Politics,” in Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer ed., *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), 299.

So, how do we stand up to oppression? I want to answer this by quoting Maria Ressa:

By embracing values, defined early—they're the subtitles of the chapters you've read: honesty, vulnerability, empathy, moving away from emotions, embracing your fear, believing in the good. You can't do it alone. You have to create a team, strengthen your area of influence. Then connect the bright spots and weave a mesh together. Avoid thinking in terms of 'us against them.' Stand in someone else's shoes. And do unto others as you would have them do unto you.<sup>65</sup>

Vilifying the poor for their continued support of Duterte is not going to end oppression and would only perpetuate violence. While it can be said that many of us were only tricked by lies, choosing to continue to support oppressors and their inhumane policies also contributes to violence. We must hold accountable those who take advantage of structural injustices and limit our freedom. While there is no fixed formula for living an ethical life, we must constantly question our actions and motives, aware that our choices have consequences for ourselves and others. True morality, de Beauvoir tells us, resides in the "painfulness of an indefinite questioning"<sup>66</sup>—a continuous process of reflecting on our actions in light of the freedom and dignity of others. True freedom is not an isolated accomplishment but a continuous process that necessitates recognizing the freedom of others.

We cannot be free unless others are free, so our responsibility is to create conditions that allow for the mutual realization of freedom. As de Beauvoir explains, "To be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future."<sup>67</sup> In this way, the freedom of others does not limit our own but its precondition. By acknowledging our ambiguity, we affirm our freedom and duty to ourselves and others, leading to authentic and ethical lives. Ultimately, her philosophy encourages us to find meaning in the contradictions of human life and to live with purpose amidst uncertainty.

---

<sup>65</sup> Maria Ressa, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future* (New York: Harper, 2022), 261.

<sup>66</sup> De Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.



## Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir's moral philosophy and the examination of structural violence in the Philippines highlight the profound complexities of human existence and the ethical implications of our choices. Rodrigo Duterte's administration revealed how systemic violence and oppression disproportionately affect marginalized communities, illustrating that genuine progress cannot be achieved without acknowledging the structural injustices that underpin such violence. Meanwhile, De Beauvoir's assertion that true freedom is not merely the absence of constraints but an active engagement in recognizing and fostering the freedom of others underlines the moral responsibility that we have to challenge oppressive systems and continuously reflect on our actions' impact. These underscore the necessity of moving beyond simplistic views of morality and ethics to embrace a more nuanced understanding of freedom that includes the liberation of all individuals.

In a world where freedom and oppression coexist, the call to action is clear: we must strive for a moral framework that prioritizes empathy, solidarity, and the mutual recognition of each person's inherent dignity. Only by collectively addressing the root causes of oppression and actively working toward a more just society can we realize the potential for a future where everyone can experience true freedom. The pursuit of ethical living requires not only personal accountability but also a commitment to transforming societal structures that perpetuate inequality and suffering. Freedom must be envisioned as a shared journey where the liberation of one is inextricably linked to the liberation of all.

The struggle for freedom is ongoing, and the drive for liberation never entirely disappears, even in the most oppressive circumstances. De Beauvoir observes that children, in their innocence and joy, serve as living symbols of human transcendence. As long as this hope persists, the desire for freedom will endure:

Yet, with all this sordid resignation, there were children who played and laughed; and their smile exposed the lie of their oppressors: it was an appeal and a promise; it projected a future before the child, a man's future. If in all oppressed countries, a child's face is so moving, it is not that the child is more moving or that he has more of a right to happiness than the others; it is that he is the living affirmation of human transcendence: he is on the

watch, he is an eager hand held out to the world, he is a hope, a project.<sup>68</sup>

*Department of Anthropology  
College of Social Science and Philosophy  
University of the Philippines Diliman*

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

## References

- Amnesty International, "Over 7,000 People Killed in Six Months in Philippines 'War on Drugs,'" in *Amnesty International UK*, (18 May 2020), <<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/philippines-president-duterte-war-on-drugs-thousands-killed>>.
- Arp, Kristana, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Joys of Existence," in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 25:1 (15 November 2009), 38–49, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-02501008>>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "The Joys of Disclosure: Simone De Beauvoir and the Phenomenological Tradition," ed. by Anna Tymieniecka, in *Analecta Husserliana*, LXXXVIII (2005): 393–406.
- Asia News Network, "What Is Oplan Tokhang and Why Is It in the News?," in *Asia News Network* (20 November 2019), <<https://asianews.network/what-is-oplan-tokhang-and-why-is-it-in-the-news/>>.
- Bartolome, Jessica, "The Kian Delos Santos Case: A Timeline," in *GMA News Online* (29 November 2018), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/specials/content/24/the-kian-delos-santos-case-a-timeline/>>.
- Beltran, Michael, "How a 'tsunami of Disinformation' Helped Marcos Jr Win Back Power," in *Al Jazeera* (29 June 2022), <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/6/29/disinformation-reigns-in-philippines-as-marcos-jr-takes-top-job>>.
- Berehulak, Daniel, "'They Are Slaughtering Us Like Animals,'" in *The New York Times* (7 December 2016), <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/07/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-drugs-killings.html>>.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

- Chua, Yvonne T, Maria Diosa Labiste, and Felipe Jose Gonzales, "Filipino Voters Were Engulfed in Relentless Stream of Disinformation," feature story, *University of the Philippines* (11 May 2022), <<https://up.edu.ph/filipino-voters-were-engulfed-in-relentless-stream-of-disinformation/>>.
- CMFR, "Government 's Role in the Spread of Disinformation," in *CMFR* (14 April 2023), <<https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/government-s-role-in-the-spread-of-disinformation/>>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Marcos Follows Duterte's Model of Disinformation," in *CMFR* (14 April 2023), <<https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/marcos-follows-dutertes-model-of-disinformation/>>.
- David, Randolph S., "Populism and the Continuing Allure of Authoritarianism in the Philippines," in Edilberto C. De Jesus and Ivyrose S. Baysic ed., *Martial Law in the Philippines: Lessons and Legacies, 1972–2022* (Quezon City: Bughaw, 2023), 62–80.
- De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, (New York, New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc, 2018).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Sheila Malovany-Chevallier and Constance Borde, (London: Vintage Classic, 2011).
- De Jesus, Ed C., Ivyrose S. Baysic, and Ricardo G. Abad ed., *Martial Law in the Philippines: Lessons and Legacies, 1972–2022*, (Quezon City: Bughaw, 2023).
- Duterte, Rodrigo, "Full Text: President Duterte's 2018 State of the Nation Address," in *Rappler* (23 July 2018), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/207989-rodrigo-duterte-sona-2018-philippines-speech/>>.
- Farmer, Paul, *Pathologies of Power: Structural Violence and the Assault on Human Rights*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- Fernandez, Gemmo, "International Efforts to Hold Duterte to Account Yield Anger from the Philippine Government," in *East Asia Forum* (4 August 2021), <<https://eastasiaforum.org/2021/08/04/international-efforts-to-hold-duterte-to-account-yield-anger-from-the-philippine-government/>>.
- Garcia, Pia, "Six Years on: Did the Duterte Administration Deliver on Its Anti-Corruption Promise?" in *Good Governance Philippines* (15 August 2022), <<https://governance.neda.gov.ph/six-years-on-did-the-duterte-administration-deliver-on-its-anti-corruption-promise/>>.
- Gavilan, Jodesz, "Duterte's Violent War on Drugs, as Recorded by Rights Groups, Int'l Bodies," in *Rappler* (20 July 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/list-reports-documentation-rodrigo-duterte-drug-war-killings/>>.

- Gonzales, Iris, "Duterte's Drug War Threatens Philippine Democracy," in *New Internationalist* (5 July 2017), <<https://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2016/09/15/dutertes-drug-war-threatens-philippine-democracy>>.
- The Guardian. "Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte Urges People to Kill Drug Addicts," in *The Guardian* (1 July 2016), <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/01/philippines-president-rodrigo-duterte-urges-people-to-kill-drug-addicts>>.
- Kruks, Sonia, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom," in *Social Text*, 17 (1987), 111-122, <<https://doi.org/10.2307/466482>>.
- La Caze, Marguerite, "Simone de Beauvoir: Freedom and the Scandal of Death," in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 21:1 (15 November 2005), 142-154, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-02101015>>.
- Lerma, Raffy, "Dead Serious," *Raffy Lerma* (24 December 2016), <<https://www.raffylerma.com/blog-1>>.
- Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva, "Simone de Beauvoir's Ethics and Its Relation to Current Moral Philosophy," in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 14:1 (25 November 1997), 39-46, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-01401006>>.
- Marso, Lori J., "Simone de Beauvoir on Violence and Politics," in Laura Hengehold and Nancy Bauer ed., *A Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), 299-310.
- Mogato, Manny, Karen Lerma, David Lague, and Jerome Morales, "Blood and Benefits: Duterte Imposes His Formula on the Philippines," in *Reuters* (28 December 2016), <<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/philippines-davao-model/>>.
- Noriega, Richa, "Tsek.Ph: 92% of False Info Favorable to Marcos, 96% of Disinformation vs Robredo Negative," in *GMA News Online* (7 May 2022), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/830939/tsek-ph-92-of-false-info-favorable-to-marcos-96-of-disinformation-vs-robredo-negative/story/>>.
- Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, "Rodrigo Duterte," in *OCCRP* (2017), <<https://www.occrp.org/en/person-of-the-year/rodrigo-duterte>>.
- Paris, Janella, "Duterte and the Poor: What the Surveys Say," in *Rappler* (30 June 2019), <<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/234195-analysis-public-surveys-about-duterte-from-2016-2019/>>.
- Parrocha, Azer, "Corruption Can't Be Stopped, Only Minimized: Duterte," in *Philippine News Agency* (27 June 2022), <<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1177652>>.

- Phillips, Kristine, "Duterte Has a Name for Innocent People Killed in the Philippines' Drug War: Collateral Damage," in *The Washington Post* (18 October 2016), <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/10/18/duterte-has-a-name-for-innocent-people-killed-in-the-philippines-drug-war-collateral-damage/>>.
- Punay, Edu, "'Kian Begged for His Life before Cops Shot Him,'" in *Philstar.com* (3 October 2017), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/03/1745309/kian-begged-his-life-cops-shot-him>>.
- Ressa, Maria, *How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for our Future*, (New York, New York: Harper, 2022).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Propaganda War: Weaponizing the Internet," in *Rappler* (18 May 2023), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/148007-propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet/>>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: The Principle Text of Modern Existentialism*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).
- Social Weather Stations, "Social Weather Stations: Fourth Quarter 2021 Social Weather Survey: 69% of Adult Filipinos Say the Problem of Fake News in Media Is Serious," in *Social Weather Stations* (25 February 2022), <[https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20220225130129&mc\\_cid=368bdea2b7](https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20220225130129&mc_cid=368bdea2b7)>.
- Sullivan, Ian M., "Simone de Beauvoir and Confucian Role Ethics: Role-relational Ambiguity and Confucian Mystification," in *Hypatia*, 31:3 (2016), 620–635, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12262>>.
- Taqueban, Efenita May M., "A Way Out in Eden: Maternal Health Crisis in Manila," *Philippine Social Sciences Review*, 65:2 (2013): 1–43.
- Tejada, Ariel Paolo, "Duterte Vows to End Criminality in 3 Months," in *Philstar* (16 May 2016), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/02/20/1555349/duterte-vows-end-criminality-3-months>>.
- Tuquero, Loreben, "51% of Filipinos Find It Difficult to Spot Fake News on Media –SWS," in *Rappler* (26 February 2022), <<https://www.rappler.com/philippines/sws-survey-fake-news-december-2021/>>.
- Viray, Patricia Lourdes, "Duterte Admits Being Indebted to Imee Marcos," in *Philstar* (29 December 2016), <<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/12/29/1657805/duterte-admits-being-indebted-imee-marcos>>.

Weiss, Gail, "Freedom, Oppression and the Possibilities of Ethics for Simone de Beauvoir," in *Simone de Beauvoir Studies*, 18:1 (25 November 2002), 9–21, <<https://doi.org/10.1163/25897616-01801003>>.

## Figurations of French Critical Theory<sup>1</sup>

*Paolo A. Bolaños*

**Abstract:** In this brief article, I merely present a schematic presentation of the “figurations” of French critical theory. I rehearse the historical and institutional circumstances of French academia that produced progressive thinkers, such as, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, inter alia. I, then, highlight the privileged position of philosophy in French society and how such privilege nurtured the culture of social and political critique and praxis in France. The influence of G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche on French intellectuals is given relative attention. Moreover, I identify Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche as the link between French critical theory and the Frankfurt School. Towards the end, I argue that French critical theorists share with their Frankfurt counterparts the normative assumptions of critical theory laid out by Max Horkheimer in the 1930s: the anthropological, the practical, and the emancipative.

**Keywords:** Critical theory, Frankfurt School, French philosophy, theory and praxis

No philosophy happens in a vacuum. It is only in this sense that we are able to speak about French philosophy—for it is a tradition that emerges out of the historical and institutional circumstances of France. We may describe the development of French philosophy to be between “orthodox” and “unorthodox,” that is, between dogma and iconoclasm. It is interesting to note the irony that we usually associate French thought with the progressive ideas of the likes of Simone Weil, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Hyppolite, Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, and Quentin Meillassoux—to name a few—while oblivious to the fact that these so-called radically progressive thinkers are actually products of an extremely rigorous academic tradition in France. It is not

---

<sup>1</sup> By figurations I mean “characteristics” or “features” or, in music, the “structure of a musical piece.”

surprising that contemporary Continental philosophy is dominated by French thinkers and, equally not accidental, that these thinkers come from either the *École normale supérieure* (ENS) or the *Université de Paris* (Sorbonne). Even before entering the university, young French students will experience the “privileged status of philosophy” in France for they are introduced to the history of philosophy early on during their *lycée* years.<sup>2</sup> However, philosophy does not stop in the classroom: philosophical discussions are engrained in public conversations—for instance, Radio France has a weekly show, *Les vendredis de la philosophie*, where issues on classical and contemporary philosophy and their relation to society are discussed.<sup>3</sup> Unlike in most countries, philosophy is not unusual in French culture—rather, it has a wide public following and philosophers are treated with high regard. In other words, in France, philosophers can wear their own hats.

But while this cultural rootedness of philosophy has produced the most radical and brilliant French thinkers, it is no secret among these intellectuals that they are products of a “centralized” or “standardized” educational structure with a “high degree of homogeneity.”<sup>4</sup> Ironically, in France, while philosophy is a public discourse, the job description of a “philosopher” is profoundly elitist; while in other countries, such as the Philippines, this privilege is enjoyed by lawyers, medical doctors, and clergymen, but not philosophers. The culmination of a French student’s institutional education is the *agrégation*—a very competitive civil exam taken by those who intend to apply for university teaching positions in public high schools and universities.<sup>5</sup> This is similar to the German *Habilitationschrift*, where students are required to write a second dissertation that qualifies them for university teaching. The difference is that the French *agrégation* is a set of standardized exams in the form of essays and oral presentations. It is through this rigorous process that students become particularly well-versed in the history of philosophy, so they become, first and foremost, historians of philosophy (like Deleuze); and they become steep in the writings of Greek philosophers down to the most modern, depending on the period.<sup>6</sup> As such, those who study philosophy imbibe the culture of engaging with the “rich vocabularies of the past,”<sup>7</sup> building on these vocabularies and developing their own original philosophical ways of thinking.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Gary Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

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

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Alan Shrift, “The Effects of the Agrégation de Philosophie on Twentieth-Century French Philosophy,” in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46 (2008), 449–474.

<sup>7</sup> Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, 9.



Interestingly, as Gary Gutting notes, the characteristically elitist French system, while steep in the tradition of textual canons in philosophy, was not contented with closed cultic discipleships, but, rather, encouraged those who are taking the *agrégation* to become independent thinkers in their own right.<sup>8</sup> “Philosophical creativity” was, therefore, common among the most brilliant of students. Such philosophical creativity was enhanced by the exposure of students “to figures and approaches that were far from popular but maintained a presence primarily through the pedagogical force of a great teacher.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, students were also exposed to disciplines outside philosophy, for example literature, history, psychology, physics, and mathematics. As a result, students trained in the French system had an in-depth knowledge of the history of philosophy and a wider grasp of culture.<sup>10</sup>

As an enterprise, philosophy has a peculiar place in French society. As mentioned, philosophers are highly regarded by the public and, as such, they are expected to demonstrate certain positions on contemporary social and political issues. The true litmus test for theory is society itself. It does not come as a surprise that the theoretical works, for example, of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Rancière are actively engaged in political questions. This tendency is not unusual in French academia, especially in the writings of philosophers. In a very concrete manner, the French educational system bred not only historians of philosophy and metaphysicians, but, more importantly, political theorists and commentators who demonstrated—either explicitly or implicitly—the marriage between theory and praxis. In this sense, much of French philosophy is essentially social and political philosophy. Deleuze, himself, describes philosophy as a “tool box” of ideas from which we could pick up concepts to make sense of the perplexing social world.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Foucault attempted to expose the relationship between power and social order, and through his historical-theoretical work he was able to show the oppressive tendency of power relations and how these relations are subtly imbedded in our social imaginary.<sup>12</sup> Even Derrida, who was the least politically active of the three, did say that philosophy “has a

---

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

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

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, “Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 208.

<sup>12</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

political significance"<sup>13</sup>—however, this only became explicit in his more mature engagements with the ideas of Karl Marx, the politics of friendship, and the concept of justice.

One figure who was instrumental in the intellectual development of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida was the Hegelian scholar Jean Hyppolite, whose *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* was influential on a generation of young students both in ENS and the Sorbonne. For these students, the orientation towards the relationship between thinking and history was reinforced by Hyppolite's lectures on Hegel.<sup>14</sup> Hyppolite, moreover, emphasized Hegel's philosophy of history that attempted to study the underlying meaning of the historical process.<sup>15</sup> Although this preoccupation with Hegel was already found in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. The difference is that Sartre's reading of Hegel was still haunted by his existentialist humanism, a tendency that Deleuze abhorred despite his admiration for Sartre. Meanwhile, Hyppolite's interpretation veered away from an over-emphasis on human consciousness and, instead, emphasized the historical aspect of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>16</sup> This latter reading was more attractive to the young Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida who were contemplating on the possibility of a philosophy of history that decentralizes the view that the subject is the center of the universe. Instead, they were attracted to the relationship between history and political action. Hyppolite's "historical commentary" on Hegel goes as far as claiming that Marx was simply commenting on *Phenomenology of the Spirit* when he wrote the *1844 Manuscripts*.<sup>17</sup>

Louis Althusser's structuralist reading of Marx was also crucial in the intellectual development of French philosophy in the 1960s, specifically on Foucault and Derrida, but more indirectly on Deleuze. Once again, beyond the existentialist reading of Sartre, Althusser provided, like Hyppolite, an interpretation of Marx that did not revolve around the subject. This entailed, for Althusser, a critique of all aspects of Marxism previously conceived. This includes a movement away from the humanist Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* to the more mature *Das Kapital*, where Althusser located a structuralist

---

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 111.

<sup>14</sup> See Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

<sup>15</sup> See Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel* (Paris: Editions Marcel Rivière et cie, 1968).

<sup>16</sup> See Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, 22–23.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. by John O'Neill (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), vi–vii. Also see Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964).

explanation of modes of production.<sup>18</sup> This, I believe, is diametrically opposed to how the Frankfurt School critical theorists treated Marx—via a return to the *1844 Manuscripts*, specifically to the theory and critique of alienation.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the proponents of the Frankfurt School, Foucault and Deleuze did not focus on the theory of alienation, instead, their theoretical critique of social pathologies follows the direction of a critique of relations of power (Foucault), the increasing complexification of societal structures (Deleuze).

However, more than Hegel and Marx, it was Friedrich Nietzsche who had the most profound influence on French philosophy of the 1960s. However, the Nietzschean engagements of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida seem to be manifestations of their oedipal relationship with Hegel. According to Gutting, Nietzsche was, for them, a way to develop an anti-Hegelian stance.<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche was pivotal in Foucault's development of a genealogical method, an alternative to Hegel's dialectical materialism, that aims to overcome the metaphysical sway of origins and, instead, emphasizes the role of chance in history.<sup>21</sup> For his part, Deleuze wrote the ingenious *Nietzsche and Philosophy* where he offers alternative interpretations of Nietzschean ideas of power, force, values, etc. Deleuze begrudgingly claims that the "Hegelian themes present in the work as the enemy against which it fights."<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Derrida engages in a close reading of Nietzsche, one that is demonstrative of the deconstructive approach that shows, for instance, the "undecidability" of meaning in Nietzsche's writings. Derrida describes the experience of reading Nietzsche as one of "*impouvoir*" or powerlessness—what this shows is the circuitous character of writing and reading that inevitably presumes a bravado of "presence" that always fails to keep its promise of certitude. The peculiarity of Nietzsche's own text is that it reveals

---

<sup>18</sup> See Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. by G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 47–52.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno dramatize the dialectic between "external nature" and "inner nature" resulting in the domination of the former by the latter. Such domination alienates us from our original "mimetic" encounter with nature. See *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 24–25. Meanwhile, Erich Fromm discusses extensively Marx's theory of alienation in *Marx's Concept of Man* (London: Continuum, 2004), 37–48.

<sup>20</sup> Gutting, *Thinking the Impossible*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 76–100. It is interestingly ironic that the original French version of this essay appeared in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* (1971), a collection of tribute essays to his Hegelian teacher.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), 162. My view, however, is that Deleuze is more anti-Hyppolite than anti-Hegel.

this undecidability as opposed of obfuscating it which is a radical movement away from the Hegelian promise of Absolute Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

The profound influence of the three figures briefly outlined above—Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche—is something that French critical theory shares with the Frankfurt School tradition. In spite of the uneasiness that Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse had with the teleological tendency of the Hegelian system, they, nevertheless, had a “magnetic attraction”<sup>24</sup> to the philosophy of Hegel—as they were especially receptive to Hegel’s idea of the dialectic. This interest was further intensified by the publication of Georg Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* in 1923 which became influential on the first generation Frankfurt School, especially Lukacs’ Hegelian interpretation of Marx which focuses on the dialectical development of proletarian consciousness.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Horkheimer, this influence figures clearly in his early works, specifically in his lecture on the history of German Idealism where he presents a materialist reading of the development of modern philosophy from Kant to Hegel, with the development of bourgeois society as the subtext.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Adorno’s engagement with Hegel was more pronounced after the Second World War. Similar to Horkheimer, Adorno’s reading of Hegel is profoundly materialist. However, unlike Horkheimer who sought to expose the inherent materialist motivation of Hegel’s philosophy, Adorno’s interpretation of Hegel is informed by a critique of contemporary society: the focus is whether Hegel “has any meaning for the present ... what the present means in the face of Hegel.”<sup>27</sup> As such, Adorno’s approach forces Hegel to contend with the current state of things in contemporary society and, in effect, also presents a critique of the Hegelian system. For his part, Marcuse offers a comprehensive account of both Hegel and Marx in *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, where Marcuse demonstrates that “Hegel’s basic concepts are hostile to the tendencies that have led into Fascist theory and practice.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover,

---

<sup>23</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> James Gordon Finlayson, “Hegel and the Frankfurt School,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. by Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 719.

<sup>25</sup> See Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), 46–82.

<sup>26</sup> See Max Horkheimer, “Vorlesung über die Geschichte der deutschen idealistischen Philosophie von Kant bis Hegel,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 10 (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1990), 12–165.

<sup>27</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1955), vii.

Marcuse emphasizes the anthropological dimension, as opposed to a pure metaphysical interpretation, of Hegel's dialectic: "the material strivings for a free and rational order of life ... the 'unreasonable' reality has to be altered until it comes into conformity with reason."<sup>29</sup> Through this anthropological reading, Marcuse is able to bring to light the materialist as well as the revolutionary aspects of Hegel's philosophy.

Aside from sharing key foundational philosophical influences, it may be argued that French critical theorists also share fundamental normative assumptions with their German counterpart. I think that Horkheimer's conception of critical theory, derived from his writings in the 1930s, aptly captures the concerns of Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida. Firstly, both French critical theory and the Frankfurt School are concerned with the critique of social reality. Both traditions see that we inhabit an environment that is largely mediated by human intervention—that we create our own "historical way of life in its totality,"<sup>30</sup> a profoundly Hegelian assumption. Therefore, critical theory is aware that our human aspirations and practices are imbedded within the social structures we have invented. Secondly, the ethico-practical assumption of the Frankfurt School, the emancipation from slavery and the abolition of social injustice,<sup>31</sup> is also present, albeit implicitly, in the writings of the French critical theorists. This is the pre-political assumption of critical theory, that all human beings—regardless of race, gender, religion, culture, and political orientation—struggle to be free. Hence, freedom is a universal practical assumption. Thirdly, although once again more implicitly compared to the Frankfurt School, given their deep sense of social justice, French critical theorists decentralize the role of the proletariat. Like their Frankfurt counterparts, they view the emancipative impulse as plural and not confined to proletarian sensibilities.<sup>32</sup> As such, given the pre-political demand for social freedom, both German and French critical theory recognize the emancipatory potential of any social group.

It must be noted that it would be misleading to assume that Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida are the only thinkers that comprise French critical theory. The Hegelian-Marxist-Nietzschean influence and the three normative assumptions—anthropological, practical, and emancipative—outlined above are, arguably, present too in the critical writings of other French thinkers, such as, Althusser, Badiou, Balibar, Lacan, Lyotard, Meillassoux, Rancière, and Ricoeur, inter alia. The only main difference between the German and French variants of critical theory is that the former were an organized group

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

<sup>30</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1989), 244.

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, 242–46.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibid.*, 242, 213–214.

of intellectuals from various academic institutions under the roof of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, while the latter were less organized, somewhat autarchic, individual thinkers who were trained under a singular academic system. Perhaps, this difference in training and organization also profoundly informed their styles of philosophizing: since, despite sharing commonalities in intellectual heritage and theoretical-normative assumptions, their respective philosophical writing styles are palpably distinct from one another.

*Department of Philosophy  
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

- Adorno, Theodor, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999).
- Althusser, Louis, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. by G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014).
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987).
- Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. by Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).
- Finlayson, James Gordon, "Hegel and the Frankfurt School," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. by Dean Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 76–100.
- Fromm, Erich, *Marx's Concept of Man* (London: Continuum, 2004).
- Gutting, Gary, *Thinking the Impossible: French Philosophy Since 1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

- Horkheimer, Max, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1989).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Vorlesung über die Geschichte der deutschen idealistischen Philosophie von Kant bis Hegel," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 10 (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1990), 12–165.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- Hyppolite, Jean, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's 'Phenomenology of the Spirit,'* trans. by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Introduction à la Philosophie de l'Histoire de Hegel* (Paris: Editions Marcel Rivière et cie, 1968).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. by John O'Neill (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969).
- Lukacs, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971).
- Marcuse, Herbert, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1955).
- Marx, Karl, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964).
- Shrift, Alan, "The Effects of the Agrégation de Philosophie on Twentieth-Century French Philosophy," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46 (2008), 449–474.

## Chaosophy: Chaos, Chaosmosis, and Precarious Ethics

---

**Raniel SM. Reyes**

**Abstract:** This article rethinks Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theorization of chaos and chaosmosis, including their evolving configurations in the present. Initially, I elucidate chaos as a virtual totality and a vector of milieus. Through rhythm, chaos is creatively neutralized, and its affirmative potentials are unleashed. Furthermore, I explain the interplay between philosophy, art, and science, particularly their power to cast a plane over chaos through concepts, percepts, and functives. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari critically assert that capitalism vis-a-vis chaos is a universal "disaster for thought." However, I engage with Franco Berardi's formulation of precarious ethics to make their engagement more contemporary. Such exploration seeks to probe chaosmosis' relevance and tensions with current predicaments and hopes to discover novel ways of breathing within chaos. Despite some divergences involving their projects, Berardi's ethics is substantially informed by Deleuze and Guattari's contention that initiating a direct or grand opposition against chaos is futile because it feeds on war. More importantly, they remain faithful to the definition of philosophy, i.e., the formulation of new concepts and practices that would capacitate people to creatively navigate and survive in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** chaos, chaosmosis, chaoid, semiocapitalism

Deleuze and Guattari view the May 1968 phenomenon as a "becoming breaking through history"<sup>1</sup> because it radically challenges the standard concepts of conventional psychoanalysis, party politics, social movements, and intellectual scholarship. Convergently, all these fields receive philosophical legitimization from the identitarian notion of the rational human subject. Sad to say, the French herd was unable to profoundly grasp the radical potential of this event defined by molecular lines of flight:

---

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 153.



“There is always something that flows or ... escapes the binary organizations, the resonance apparatus, and the overcoding machine: things that are attributed to a ‘change in values,’ the youth, women, the mad, etc.”<sup>2</sup> Significantly, this novel event eluded different forms of representation and, more importantly, opened the people to the future. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

The politicians, the parties, the unions, many leftists, were utterly vexed; they kept repeating over and over again that ‘conditions’ were not ripe. It was as though they had been temporarily deprived of the entire dualism machine that made them valid spokespeople ... A molecular flow was escaping, minuscule at first, then swelling, without, however, ceasing to be unassignable.<sup>3</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* primarily seeks to reconstruct Wilhelm Reich’s query about the rise of fascism in the 20th century: *How could the masses be made to desire their own oppression?*<sup>4</sup> As the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, this book launches a critique of the French people’s reactive instinct or voluntary submission to ‘State philosophy,’ especially in the post-1968 era. Despite the belligerency of this literature, *A Thousand Plateaus*, the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* received higher acclaim. The apparently restrained language of the second book moderates the militant fervor of the first. Historically, *A Thousand Plateaus* was informed by the 1973 oil crisis in France, which abolished the people’s hope for a grand societal reconfiguration. Including other revolutionaries, Deleuze and Guattari criticize capitalist structures, and accentuates the necessity for novel forms of socio-political and economic interventions and organizations against the backdrop of global interdependencies. In his “Foreword” to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi opines that, “For many French intellectuals, the hyperactivism of post-May gave way to a mid-seventies slump, then a return to religion (*Tel Quel*) or political conservatism (*the Nouveaux Philosophes*) in a foreshadowing of the Reagan eighties.”<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, Alain Badiou in *The Communist Hypothesis* presents a nuanced appropriation that cuts across Deleuze and Guattari’s critical

---

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 216.

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

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 38.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, xi.

affirmation of May 1968 and its subsequent criticisms. For him, this event is not a unitary festival but a complexity and heterogenous multiplicity.<sup>6</sup> As a complexity, it is associated with both positive and negative relevance and implications. As a heterogenous multiplicity, Badiou contends that there are ‘four different ‘May ‘68s.’<sup>7</sup> Badiou earnestly encourages scholars and revolutionaries to revisit these four hypotheses to comprehensively understand this event, especially in the context of the contemporary epoch. More importantly, he wants to salvage the revolutionary spirit of May ‘68 despite its contradictory aftermaths. As no universal historical agent would enact revolution and emancipation, there is likewise no singular way to interpret it. Notwithstanding its varying trajectories, it remains a fecund depository for education, inspiration, and revolutionary transformation. In this regard, Badiou fiercely pushes for a genealogical reinvention of May 1968 to reformulate communism as a viable revolutionary alternative and a continuing hypothesis. Ultimately, abhorrence to this ongoing project may lead to a cursory acceptance of “the inevitability of the unbridled capitalist economy and the parliamentary politics that supports it, then we quite simply cannot see the other possibilities that are inherent in the situation in which we find ourselves.”<sup>8</sup>

A decade after May 1968, the same thinkers who played vital roles in the protest, such as Deleuze, Guattari, Barthes, Sartre, and Kristeva, also participated in the July 1977 revolution in Italy.<sup>9</sup> Generally, the Italian Autonomous movement called for an international meeting whose main agenda revolved around the idea of repression. However, these French intellectuals clarified that revolution should not focus on the shattering of the state. Instead, the optimal technique to define the new revolution, Berardi underlines, is through

the Deleuzian concept of line of flight: exodus from the  
kingdom of exploitation and the creation of a new social

---

<sup>6</sup> Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2010), 45.

<sup>7</sup> The first sense or hypothesis involved the prominent revolt of the young university and school students; the second dealt with an enormous general strike headed by young workers and union members; the third talked about the libertarian May, which sought to transform the broader moral climate, sexual relations, individual freedom, and gender difference; and lastly, revolved around the incredulity towards the universal historical agency capable of leading the revolution and liberation (see *Ibid.*, 45–53).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Franco Berardi, *The Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, ed. by Erik Empson & Stevphen Shukaitis. Trans. by Arianna Bove, Erik Empson, Michael Goddard, Giuseppina Mecchia, Antonella Schintu, and Steve Wright. London: Minor Compositions, 2009), 25.

sphere, which has nothing to do with power, labor or the market ... The main subject ought not to have been repression, but the way of escaping the coming capitalist restoration, the possibility of launching a new idea of autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

As one of the leading proponents of *Autonomia Operaia*, Berardi polemically describes May 1968 as a period of devolution, “the peak of human progress ... of democracy as critical participation; since then we have been living through a continuous process of cultural devolution, political regression, and social impoverishment.”<sup>11</sup> 1968 and the years that followed paved way for the maximal convergence between technological knowledge and social consciousness. As years passed, technology surmounted and totalized society and started to increasingly dominate the social body, while society became impotent in governing itself. Democracy, which for Badiou is already totalized by the market economy, turned bankrupt of political resources in controlling capitalist deregulation of finance and technology, while individuals underwent accelerated technological mutation.<sup>12</sup> Berardi expounds:

... social consciousness was expected to take control of technological change and to direct it for the common good. But the opposite happened: the leftist parties and unions regarded technology as a danger rather than as an opportunity to be mastered and submitted to the social interest. Liberation from work was labeled “unemployment,” and the Left engaged in countering the unstoppable technical transformation. As democracy proved unable to govern the techno-anthropological change, the deregulation of finance and technology carried on dismantling preexisting forms of social consciousness. As an effect of neoliberal privatization, the educational system was subjugated to the need for profit, and critical thought was separated from research and development.<sup>13</sup>

### Chaos: A Virtual Totality and Vector of Milieus

---

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

<sup>11</sup> Franco Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 122.

<sup>12</sup> See Berardi, *The Precarious Rhapsody*, 1–29; cf. Berardi, *Breathing*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 122.

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, one of Deleuze's early works, chaos is explicated in conjunction with the principle of the eternal return. Specifically, chaos eternally appears in every cyclical movement: "What this means is that chaos and cycle, becoming and eternal return have often been brought together, but as if they were opposites."<sup>14</sup> However, opposition finds no place in their relationship. The eternal return is the affirmation of necessity and chance. As a physical and ethical doctrine, it affirms the being of becoming (the return of the difference) and the being of becoming as the 'self-affirming' of becoming-active, respectively.<sup>15</sup> The world of the affirmation of chance is the world of chaosmos (chaos and cosmos). In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze explains,

The secret of the eternal return is that it does not express an order opposed to the chaos engulfing it. On the contrary, it is nothing other than chaos itself, or the power of affirming chaos ... To the coherence of representation, the eternal return substitutes something else entirely – its own chaodysey.<sup>16</sup>

Deleuze furthers the mutual relation between chaos and the eternal return in *Difference and Repetition*—the product of his *Doctorat d'État*. This sophisticated literature portrays chaos as a virtual totality and a fundamental aspect of difference and repetition. It refers to the unity of all chance irreducible to any subjective or objective representation. Writ large, chaosmos antagonizes the philosophies of representation essentially grounded on God, the World, and the Subject. In his words,

Nietzsche had already said that chaos and eternal return were not two distinct things but a single and same affirmation ... With eternal return, chaos-errancy is opposed to the coherence of representation; it excludes both the coherence of a subject which represents itself and that of an object represented. Re-petition opposes representation ....<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983), 28.

<sup>15</sup> See *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. by Constantin Boundas, trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 264.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 57.

Immanent in the inextricable relation between chaos and the eternal return is the concept of repetition. Contrary to the reductive tendencies of the Hegelian dialectics, repetition is a permeable principle constituting singularities permeated by difference. Against the Platonic notion of repetition, it emerges through difference and not via mimesis. In this manner, repetition pursues an incessant affirmation and experimentation of life repeated in its chaotic complexity and heterogeneity towards the new. The new or difference evinces “the power of beginning and beginning again,” and it summons “process in thought which are ... the powers of completely other model, from an unrecognized and unrecognizable *terra incognita*.”<sup>18</sup>

The symbiotic relationship between chaos, the eternal return, difference, and repetition is analogous to the distinction between the life-typologies of the bad and the good player in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. The bad player counts on several throws of the dice on a significant number of throws. In utilizing causality and probability, he epitomizes representation. Nevertheless, the dicethrow fails, according to Deleuze, because chance is not affirmed enough in one throw.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the good player embodies the Dionysian correlation of chance and necessity in the sense that it is not a probability distributed over numerous throws but all chance at once, “not a final desired combination, but the fatal combination, fatal and loved, not the return of combination by the number of throws, but the repetition of a dicethrow by the nature of the fatally obtained number.”<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, in the collaborative work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari critically appraise chaos and the eternal return. They perceive these principles as an inadequate fortification, i.e., a reactive return of the One and representation. In relation to chaos, they operationalize the concepts of milieu and rhythm and claim that chaos is a vector of milieus and rhythms. According to them:

Chaos is not without its own directional components, which are its own ecstasies. We have seen elsewhere how all kinds of milieus ... slide in relation to one another ... Every milieu is vibratory, ... coded ... but each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction ... The notion of the milieu is not unitary: not only does the living thing continually pass from one

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 136 and Adrian Parr, *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 226.

<sup>19</sup> See Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 27.

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

milieu to another, but the milieus pass into one another ... The milieus are open to chaos, which threatens them with exhaustion or intrusion. Rhythm is the milieu answer to chaos. What chaos and rhythm have in common is the in-between—between two milieus, rhythm-chaos or the chaosmos ... Chaos is not the opposite of rhythm, but the milieu of all milieus.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the conventional description of chaos as an agent of catastrophe and a principle of pure indeterminacy, chaos is differentiated and creative. Moreover, even though chaos is compared to an enormous black hole, a person can still craft a fragile point as a center or a home within it. In addition, chaos is not the opposite of milieus, but the totality of all milieus. Milieus are characterized by vibrations and coding. Likewise, they are determined by recurring repetitions of elements by virtue of their protean and active attributes. Significantly, milieus are defined by "a periodic repetition ... whose only effect is to produce a difference by which the milieu passes into another milieu. It is the difference that is rhythmic, not the repetition, which nevertheless produces it ...."<sup>22</sup>

It is tempting to use the concepts milieus and territory interchangeably in *A Thousand Plateaus*. However, they are not synonymous, since the former belongs to a broader category than the former. Territory "is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that 'territorializes' them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms ... In fact, territory is a mode of actively territorializing milieus."<sup>23</sup> When the codes, elements, and structures of milieus are modified and transfigured, territories emerge. Subsequently, territories serve as a fertile ground for the conjunction and proliferation of identities and the cultivation of numerous becomings. In nuancing the dynamic relationship between milieu and territory, Deleuze and Guattari introduce two other important concepts—'deterritorialization' and 'reterritorialization'.<sup>24</sup> The former is immanent in all territories as a catalyst or a vector of the new. Since all territories constitute assemblages<sup>25</sup> in perpetual interplay and lines of escape, deterritorialization, therefore, is an

---

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 313.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

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

<sup>24</sup> In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe this process as *a coming undone* (see Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 322). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is classified into absolute deterritorialization and relative deterritorialization (see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 55–56).

<sup>25</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 88.

inherent principle and process in all territories. The latter, on the other hand, is a correlated process that ensues deterritorialization. It does not endorse a return to old territories, but instead prompts the qualitative recombination of deterritorialized codes or forces toward novel eruption of events, such as the EDSA 1 Revolution (1986) and the Arab Spring (2010-2012) or segmentarized functions and inhuman practices, as exemplified by the Holocaust (1941-1945) and the bombing of Hiroshima (1945).

In navigating the relationship between chaos, milieu, and territory, Deleuze and Guattari utilize the concept 'rhythm' as an in-between principle that regulates chaos' disruptive force and simultaneously the interaction and recombination of milieus or territories. Rhythm is not only a social, environmental, and ethnographic principle of becoming, but it is also relevant in the arts, especially in musicology.

In music, whereas rhythm regulates the inherent chaos that undergirds its movement and transformation, the refrain (*ritournello*) serves as a marker capacitated in territorializing assemblages. The term 'refrain' originally appears in Guattari's book, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*. When it appears in *A Thousand Plateaus*, it is associated with music: "... refrain is properly musical content, the block of content proper to music. A child comforts itself in the dark or claps its hands or invents a way of walking, adapting it to the cracks in the sidewalk...."<sup>26</sup> In other words, the refrain is a principle of consistency or territoriality. Even the most deterritorialized component or elements of territories can be territorialized by the refrain and subjected to consistency. In Guattari's perspective, the deterritorialization of man's *Umwelt* has led man to reinvent diagrammatic operators such as faciality and refrains enabling him to produce new machinic territorialities."<sup>27</sup> At this juncture, however, it must be underscored that as a territorial assemblage, it only establishes temporary territories, landscapes, and assemblages constitutive of heterogeneous resources and then deterritorializes recurrently to reshuffle the relations of elements. In addition, the refrain also assumes other functions, such as "professional or social, liturgical or cosmic: it always carries earth with it; it has a land ... as its concomitant; it has an essential relation to a Natal, a Native."<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, the 'refrain' can uncork hidden potentialities within and beyond a particular territory.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 209.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 116, Felix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*, trans. by Taylor Adkins (MA: Semiotext(e), 2011), 110, and Eugene Young, Gary Genosko, and Janell Watson, *The Deleuze & Guattari Dictionary*, 255.

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 312.

<sup>29</sup> See *Ibid.*, 325-326.

## Chaosmosis: An Ethics of Chaos

In the last collaborative work, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that philosophy is not contemplation, reflection, and communication but rather the creation of new concepts. In the process of formulation, philosophy has to “determine its moment, its occasion and circumstances, its landscapes and personae, its conditions and unknowns. It had to be possible to ask the question ‘between friends,’ as a secret or a confidence, or as a challenge when confronting the enemy, and at the same time to reach that twilight hour when one distrusts even the friend.”<sup>30</sup> In this regard, philosophy is the concept’s friend in the Greek sense of the word. The principal objective of philosophy is “to create concepts that are always new. Because the concept must be created, it refers back to the philosopher as the one who has it potentially, or who has its power and competence.”<sup>31</sup>

In creating concepts, philosophy presupposes the plane of immanence, “a powerful Whole that, while remaining open, is not fragmented: an unlimited One-All, an ‘Omnitudo’ that includes all the concepts on one and the same plane.”<sup>32</sup> The plane of immanence is likewise posited as a pre-philosophical plane that acts as philosophy’s internal conditions. Remarkably, Deleuze and Guattari underscore that the non-philosophical (philosophy’s Other) is much “closer to the heart of philosophy, than philosophy itself.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, they make sense, especially concerning the moments or periods when signed philosophical concepts metamorphose into totalizing principles that annihilate their dynamicity and assemblagic attributes.

In *What is Philosophy?*, furthermore, the appropriation of chaos becomes more pronounced and critical. The plane of immanence serves like a sieve or a section of chaos. In this sense, chaos should be perceived as the absence of a connection between determinations rather than the absence of determinations. Deleuze and Guattari explicate:

[Chaos] is not a movement from one determination to the other, but, on the contrary, the impossibility of a connection between them, since one does not appear without the other having already disappeared, and one disappears as disappearance when the other disappears

---

<sup>30</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



as outline. Chaos is not inert or stationary state, nor it is a chance mixture. Chaos makes chaotic and undoes every consistency in the infinite.<sup>34</sup>

Using the language of *A Thousand Plateaus*, chaos depicts the breakdown of rhythms—an intermediary principle that facilitates chaos' displacing power and territories' possibility of becoming-other. Paradoxically, chaos signifies a kind of complexity, a *lack of presence* because of its infinite speed. In this vein, its indeterminacy and formlessness are conditioned by determinations that merely connect or become comprehensible in small or vague spaces and metamorphose at a highly accelerated speed.

In the plane of immanence, philosophy is confronted with the quandary of achieving consistency without losing grip of the infinite. Philosophy's created concepts can striate the intensive ordinates of the infinite movements "as movements which are themselves finite which form, at infinite speed, variable *contours* inscribed on the plane."<sup>35</sup> In this way, the plane of immanence necessitates the creation of concepts by making a section of chaos.

Deleuze and Guattari's appropriation of chaos distinctly depicts the contemporary condition under the supremacy of neoliberal capitalism. They lament: "Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly-off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness..."<sup>36</sup> More concretely, chaos is characterized by a vortex of accelerated rhythm of information technology and experience, depleted resources, impoverished human relations, and psychopathologized individuals. This plethora of quandaries, frequently referred to as neoliberal chaos, is responsible for different psychopathologies, such as neurosis, panic, and depression. Panic, for example, occurs when the environment moves at an incomprehensible speed. After a panicked acceleration, desire is activated, thus engendering depression: "When you are no longer able to understand the flow of information stimulating your brain, you tend to desert the field of communication, disabling any intellectual and psychological response."<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, other contemporary thinkers similarly pursued this philosophical theorization, such as Byung-Chul Han. Distinctively, he opines that the age of acceleration is already over. What conditions burnout or depression, instead, is 'dyschronicity:

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

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

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. by Francesca Cadel and Guiseppina Mecchia (CA: Semiotext(e), 2009).

Today's temporal crisis is caused by a dyschronicity which leads to various temporal disturbances and irritations. Time is lacking a rhythm that would provide order, and thus it falls out of step ... The feeling that life is accelerating is really the experience of a time that is whizzing without a direction.<sup>38</sup>

Against neoliberal chaos, this temporal crisis refers to a time devoid of rhythm and a life without end and conclusion. Appallingly, this temporal anomaly engenders narcissistic and depressive individuals and, worse, conditions blind nationalists and extremists.<sup>39</sup> However, despite Han's post-immunological critique, his formulation of dyschronicity still exemplifies the neoliberal chaos that Deleuze and Guattari discussed in *What is Philosophy?*, but on a more sophisticated configuration.

What aggravates these chaos-authored pathologies is the realization that they are closely knitted to or conditioned by much broader socio-political problems and, more importantly, chaos is impossible to eradicate or overcome wholly. Deleuze and Guattari claim that launching an explicitly belligerent war against chaos is futile and self-destructive because war is its fuel. Individuals should, therefore, moderate their relationship with it by acclimatizing with the rhythm of the cosmos and maintaining a critical alliance with it through the principle of *chaosmosis*. In their words: "It is as if the struggle against chaos does not take place without an affinity with the enemy, because another struggle develops and takes on more importance—the struggle against opinion, which claims to protect us from chaos itself."<sup>40</sup> This incommensurable realization necessitates humility and prudence or, as Deleuze describes in *The Logic of Sense*, becoming a "little alcoholic, a little crazy, a little suicidal, a little guerilla."<sup>41</sup> However, confronting chaos is not just the solitary task of the individual revolutionary. It is through friendship and/or solidarity that depression can be surmounted because it espouses an ethics of sharing or a common rhythm.

In a more enormous scope, this realization likewise admits that philosophy does not hold the single key in dealing with the problem of chaos vis-a-vis capitalism as a disaster of thought. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari underscore the importance of the three powers of thinking:

---

<sup>38</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingerin*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (UK: Polity Press, 2017), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (UK: Polity Press, 2018), 11-13. See Berardi, *Breathing*, 52.

<sup>40</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 203.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 157.

philosophy, art, and science. On one hand, they avow that these powers can transform life totalized by chaos (as a hybridity of entropy and creativity). On the other hand, chaos rhizomically traverses and enlivens philosophy, art, and science. Art and science are allies (or “friends”) of philosophy and thought, not only in confronting chaos, but also in embattling opinion (*doxa*).

In philosophy, for instance, friendship “no longer stands for an extrinsic persona ... but rather for a presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself, a living category, a transcendental lived reality.”<sup>42</sup> Through friendship, philosophers create concepts: “With the creation of philosophy, the Greeks violently force the friend into a relationship that is no longer a relationship with an other but one with an Entity..., an Essence, Plato’s friend, but even more the friend of wisdom, of truth, or the concept.”<sup>43</sup> The concept, additionally, interpenetrates with the *Other*. However, the other in the Deleuzo-Guattarian parlance is beyond the anthropological or is irreducible to being a subject or an object. Rather, it refers to a possible world under which “not only subject and object are redistributed but also figure and ground, margins and center, moving object and reference point, transitive and substantial, length and depth. The Other Person is always perceived as an other, but in its concept, it is the condition of all perception, for others as for ourselves. It is the condition for our passing from one world to another.”<sup>44</sup> This theorization of the Other bears a close affinity with the conceptualization of the atopic other in Byung-Chul Han’s *The Agony of Eros*:

Our relationship to futurity concerns the atopic Other, which cannot be assimilated into the language of the Same ... The future is the time of the Other. The totalization of the present as the time of the Same eliminates the absence that otherwise makes the Other unattainable.”<sup>45</sup>

Albeit the creation of concepts is the sole power of philosophy, it maintains a critical friendship and intersects with the other powers of thinking, which are also principles of creation. Whereas philosophy creates

---

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* In *The Agony of Eros*, Han claims that friendship and thinking presuppose or begin with eros: “To be able to think, one must first have been a friend, a lover. Without eros, thinking loses all vitality and turmoil, and becomes repetitive and reactive. Eros infuses thinking with desire for the atopic Other” (Byung-Chul Han, *The Agony of Eros*, trans. by Erik Butler (MA: MIT Press, 2017), 53.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 15.

concepts and diagrams a virtual community (plane of immanence), art creates affects and percepts (plane of composition), and science creates state of affairs and functions (plane of reference).

In relation to chaos, philosophy, art, and science are deemed as *chaoids* or the three daughters of chaos that cut chaos in different ways. For Guattari, they are decoders or elaborators of chaos: "The primary purpose of ecosophical cartography will not have the finality of communicating, but of producing enunciation concatenations able to capture the points of singularity of a situation."<sup>46</sup> Their relation to chaos makes philosophy, art, and science significant to thought. They do not create metaphysical illusions or invoke unitarian principles to protect us from chaos like opinions. Lengthily, Deleuze and Guattari contend:

We require just a little order to protect us from chaos. Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself ... This is all that we ask for ... to make an opinion for ourselves, like a sort of 'umbrella,' which protects us from chaos ... But art, science, and philosophy require more: they cast planes over the chaos ... What the philosopher brings back from the chaos are *variations* that are still infinite but that have become inseparable on the absolute surfaces or ... volumes that layout a secant plane of immanence ... The scientist brings back from the chaos *variables* that have become independent by slowing down ... so that the variables that are retained enter into determinable relations in a function ... The artist brings back from the chaos *varieties* that no longer constitute a reproduction of the sensory in the organ, but set up a ... a being of sensation, on an organic plane of composition ....<sup>47</sup>

Instead of protecting us from chaos, philosophy, art, and science affirmatively challenge or encourage people to immerse themselves in chaos by slitting the umbrella and tearing the firmament itself "to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through the rent ...."<sup>48</sup> Eventually, the three disciplines' inevitable experience of catastrophes brings back from chaos variations, variables, and varieties,

---

<sup>46</sup> Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), 128. See Franco Berardi, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 221–222.

<sup>47</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 201–202.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

respectively. In doing so, the artist, for example, struggles and initiates a leap from chaos to composition. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that if art struggles against chaos, it commences by borrowing some armaments from chaos itself to craft sensations capable of confronting opinions:

Art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes ... a *chaosmos*, a composed chaos--neither foreseen nor preconceived. Art transforms chaotic variability into *chaoid* variety ... Art struggles with chaos but it does so in order to render it sensory ....<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, science struggles with chaos by decelerating variability. Despite its ability to decelerate chaos' speed, science is inevitably attracted to the very thing it seeks to confront. Whereas art partially frames chaos towards a composed and sensible chaos, science subjects a fragment of chaos to a "system of coordinates and forms a referenced chaos that becomes Nature, and from which it extracts an aleatory function and chaoid variables."<sup>50</sup> Consecutively, philosophy struggles with chaos as an

undifferentiated abyss or ocean of dissemblance. But this does not mean that philosophy ranges itself on the side of opinion, nor that opinion can take its place ... To reach the concept it is not even enough for phenomena to be subject to principles analogous to those that associate ideas or things, or to principles that order reasons.<sup>51</sup>

The concept that philosophy creates forms inseparable variations fashioned on a plane of immanence, since it cuts across insofar as the latter crosscuts the chaotic variability and gives it consistency (reality). "A concept is therefore a chaoid state par excellence; it refers back to a chaos rendered consistent, become Thought, mental chaosmos."<sup>52</sup>

The brain serves as the junction of philosophy, art, and science. Reciprocally, the brain transforms into a 'subject' through these three powers of thinking. Additionally, these three constitute the brain's rafts in confronting chaos.<sup>53</sup> The brain initially appears as the faculty responsible for

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>53</sup> See *Ibid.*, 210.

the creation of concepts and for outlining the plane of immanence, which further grounds the concept's geography (place), movement, and relation. As it metamorphoses as a subject, "the concept becomes object as created, as event or creation itself; and philosophy becomes the plane of immanence that supports the concepts and that the brain lays out."<sup>54</sup>

These territorializations interfere with each other through the *no*, which radicalizes each's potential without assimilating them into the Same, such as interferences of philosophy in art or science or art in science or philosophy. These interferences are vital in comprehending thought and its creative struggle with chaos. But of course, some interferences surmount the planes of the three, thus exhibiting the possibility of a future or a different world. Ultimately, Deleuze and Guattari's radicalization of the brain points towards a new way to confront chaos—a new future summoned by a discipline or principle other than philosophy, art, and philosophy.<sup>55</sup> For them:

They do not need the No as beginning, or as the end in which they would be called upon to disappear by being realized, but at every moment of their becoming or their development. Now, if the three Nos are still distinct in relation to the cerebral plane, they are no longer distinct in relation to the chaos into which the brain plunges. In this submersion it seems that there is extracted from chaos the shadow of the 'people to come' in the form that art, but also philosophy and science, summon forth: mass-people, worlds-people, brain-people, chaos-people - nothinking thought that lodges in the three ... It is here that concepts, sensations, and functions become indiscernible, as if they shared the same shadow that extends itself across their different nature and constantly accompanies them.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, these interferences are non-localizable, which are relatively summoned by localizable interferences. Despite their distinct characteristics and radical capacities, philosophy, art, and science converge through the concept of the 'people-to-come.' Of course, thinking does not stop from simply positing this virtuality, and the problems plaguing contemporary society do not just evaporate instantly. What is certain is that they mutate

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-218. See Arkady Plotnitsky, "Chaomologies: Quantum Field Theory, Chaos and Thought in Deleuze and Guattari's What is Philosophy?," in *Paragraph*, 29:2 (July 2006), *Deleuze and Science*, 55.

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

and recombine with other predicaments and add more misery to the people's lives. All revolutionaries and thinkers should be aware of these inevitable pathways or possibilities. What comes after the 'people-to-come'? Given the immensity and fluidity of the capitalist adversary, should people abandon this project or think of a more realistic, if not paradoxical way to rhythmically survive in the present?

### **From Chaosis to Precarious Ethics**

#### *The Twilight of Philosophical Thinking?*

Deleuze and Guattari conclude the "Introduction" of *What is Philosophy?* by lamenting that only 'pedagogy' or the 'pedagogy of the concept' can redeem us from the quicksand of 'commercial professional training' (capitalism), which is an "absolute disaster for thought."<sup>57</sup> Despite its immanent aptitude to elude segmentations or quantifications, thinking cannot avoid the fate of being commodified by the market. This is also true of the three powers of thinking: philosophy, art, and science. They narrate:

The most shameful moment came when computer science, marketing, design, and advertising, all the disciplines of communication, seized hold of the word concept itself and said: 'This is our concern, we are the creative ones, we are the ideas men! We are the friends of the concept, we put it in our computers ... Marketing has preserved the idea of a certain relationship between the concept and the event ... The only events are exhibitions, and the only concepts are products that can be sold. Philosophy has not remained unaffected by the general movement that replaced critique with sales promotion. The ... simulation of a packet of noodles, has become the true concept; and the one who packages the product, commodity, or work of art has become the philosopher, conceptual persona, or artist.'<sup>58</sup>

When the pedagogy is unable to save these disciplines, their becomings are captured by capitalism, and they become conduits or

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. See *Ibid.*, 99 and Hans Radder ed., *The Commodification of Academic Research: Science and the Modern University* (PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010).

instruments for the proliferation of arborescent structures and oppressive conditions.

Significantly, the concept's 'plurivocity' is solely determined by its internal and external neighborhoods. Its internal neighborhood or consistency, Deleuze and Guattari elucidate, "is secured by the connection of its components in zones of indiscernibility; its external neighborhood or exoconsistency is secured by the bridges thrown from one concept to another when the components of one of them are saturated."<sup>59</sup> All these are subsumed, albeit combined, under the axiomatic of capitalism as a new form of transcendence that fashions new forms of arborescent structures and blockages to thinking. Thinking as the creation of concepts is syntagmatic, connective, linking, consistent, and not paradigmatic, projective, hierarchical, and referential. Philosophy, art, and science offer pedagogy of the concept of this sort independently in the sense that they are "no longer organized as levels of a single projection and are not even differentiated according to a common matrix but are immediately posited or reconstituted in a respective independence, in a division of labor that gives rise to relationships of connection between them."<sup>60</sup>

In the context of absolute deterritorialization, thinking involves radicalizing a plane of immanence, of deterritorializing movements which may be fast or slow: "Deterritorialization of such plane does not preclude reterritorialization but posits it as the creation of a future earth."<sup>61</sup> Of course, the earth-to-come can only be comprehended or territorialized through relative deterritorialization, which are historical, geographical, and psychological. Whereas the movements of the former are characterized by virtuality, the latter is characterized by actuality. Furthermore, while philosophy is an example of absolute deterritorialization, capitalism is an example of relative deterritorialization. The latter perpetually deterritorializes conventional socio-economic structures, cultural values, and geographical borders towards novel relations and living. However, the seemingly liberatory consequences of this dynamic process are constantly reterritorialized by capitalism to reinforce itself. As such, despite capitalism's immanent creativity or its function "as an immanent axiomatic of decoded flows (of money, labor, products),"<sup>62</sup> it remains conservative. Deleuze and Guattari made a similar pronouncement as early as *Anti-Oedipus*. They argue that despite capitalism's emancipatory potential or aptitude to decode all symbolic codes, it remains tarnished by its concealed conservatism and

---

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.



ideological propensity to reterritorialize into capture. Hence, it cannot serve as the absolute limit of society.<sup>63</sup>

As an example of absolute deterritorialization, philosophy must subject the relative deterritorialization of capital “to the absolute; it makes it pass over the plane of immanence as movement of the infinite and suppresses it as internal limit, *turns it back, against itself so as to summon forth a new earth, a new people.*”<sup>64</sup>

The enormous relative deterritorialization of global capitalism is reterritorialized on the democratic state, “the capitalist version of the society of friends.”<sup>65</sup> However, in the current period, democracy is indistinguishable from the market economy. As a new society of friendship (albeit in a degenerative manner), it actualizes as capitalism’s frontliner—a society defined by fractalized labor and hyperactivity as new modes of activity, competition as a new logic of relations, and psychopathologies as new features of subjectivity. Even authoritarian states can be penetrated by the fluid capitalist economy. In other words, the possibility of deliberative intersubjectivity (in democracy) or human rights violation (in authoritarianism) only occupies capitalism’s outer layer. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

... the market is the only thing that is universal in capitalism. In contrast with the ancient empires that carried out transcendent overcodings, capitalism functions as an immanent axiomatic of decoded flows (of money, labor, products). National States are no longer paradigms of overcoding but constitute the ‘models of realization’ of this immanent axiomatic. In an axiomatic, models do not refer back to a transcendence; quite the contrary. It is as if the deterritorialization of States tempered that of capital and provided it with compensatory reterritorializations.<sup>66</sup>

Hyper-communication, or the lack of it, is only a secondary, if not tertiary, problem today. On the contrary, Deleuze and Guattari argue, “we have too much of it. We lack creation. *We lack resistance to the present.* The

---

<sup>63</sup> “But it is the relative limit of every society; it effects relative breaks, because it substitutes for the codes an extremely rigorous axiomatic that maintains the energy of the flows in a bound state on the body of capital as a socius that is deterritorialized, but also a socius that is even more pitiless than any other” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 246).

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 99.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

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

creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist.”<sup>67</sup> It is in this sense that philosophy starts to assume a political or revolutionary form whose challenging task is “to posit a revolution as plane of immanence, infinite movement and absolute survey, but to the extent that these features connect up with what is real here and now in the struggle against capitalism, relaunching new struggles whenever the earlier one is betrayed.”<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, the virtual people or earth appears to have decreased its revolutionary viability in the age of semiocapitalism. In fact, the brain or the mind, as a radical site of conceptual innovation and aesthetic production, is now subjected to endless and accelerated mutation thanks to the complex connivance of semiocapitalism and digital technology.

### *Breathing within Chaos*

Semiocapitalism is a new mutation of capitalism based on the subjugation of the social nervous system through digital technology and semiotic algorithms. It is peopled by what Berardi calls the cognitariats or cognitive laborers who are required to invest their 24/7 investment of nervous energy and creativity in the process of production. This new semiocapitalist subjectivity is “motivated to invest their creativity in the process of production, in expectation of the success and profit that would be their reward—they were persuaded that work and capital could be forged together in the same process of mutual enrichment. Workers were encouraged to think of themselves as free agents.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, these creative investments are exhausted and ironically performed using the delusion of freedom or productivity. In *Heroes*, Berardi elaborates on the precarious condition of the cognitariats:

The essential feature of precarity in the social sphere is not the loss of regularity in the labour relation, since labour has always been more or less precarious, notwithstanding legal regulations. The essential transformation induced by the digitalization of the labour process is the fragmentation of the personal continuity of work, the fractalization and cellularization

---

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>69</sup> Berardi, *Heroes*, 137. See Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 56–73.

of time. The worker disappears as a person, and is replaced by abstract fragments of time.<sup>70</sup>

In the age of cognitive labor, there is no longer a need to invest in the availability of a person for eight hours daily because capital merely utilizes packets of time. Thanks to capitalist deregulation, flexibility has evolved into fractalized work. Fractalization “is the modular and recombinant fragmentation of the period of activity.”<sup>71</sup> As such, the cognitariat devolves into an interchangeable producer of “micro-fragments of recombinant semiosis that enter into the continuous flux of the internet.”<sup>72</sup> Surely, it affects the workers as legal entities protected by rights and economic individuals who need to pay their food, house rent, etc.<sup>73</sup>

The workers must undergo digital innovations and mutations to remain infinitely productive as if their minds need to mimic algorithmic digital transmitters. The physical, conscious, and sensitive individual is subjected to an acceleration of stimuli, i.e., a constant competitive, relentless electrocution which can lead to the pathologies of panic, attention disorder, information overload, and burnout (or psychopathologies). Since they invest everything, time for social relations, affection, and community engagement disappears (Viagra, cocaine, Prozac, coffee, game addiction, violence).<sup>74</sup> Given this post-capitalist context, how is resistance or revolution even possible today? Berardi writes:

Fractalized work ... does not set into motion any wave of struggle. The reason is easy to understand. In order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labor and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularized bodies to become community. No wave can be created, because the workers do not share their existence in time, and behaviors can only become a wave when there is a continuous proximity in time that info-labor no longer allows.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

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

<sup>73</sup> See Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 32–33.

<sup>74</sup> See *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

It is crucial to ask what is to be done in this hopeless situation. Unfortunately, when all these things rupture the flow or rhythm of mental time, and when people lost a meaningful connection with the external world, they experience chaos—"the inability to attribute meaning to the flow, the breakdown of our framework of relevance. A special vibration of the soul spreads out at this point, which we call 'panic': the subjective recording of chaos."<sup>76</sup> Depression is another inevitable consequence of semiocapitalist-manipulated life. Depression "is the inability to find sense through action, through communication."<sup>77</sup> When an individual overheats due to hyperactivity, fractalized work arrangement, and sometimes narcissism,<sup>78</sup> he/she ceases to build a shared space or bridge with his/her friends. In fact, the depressed does not perceive this bridge and the rhythmic connection between things and events. Concomitant with these political irregularities and impotence engendered or aggravated by semiocapitalism, is the rapid decay of the community and proliferation of psychopathologies.

To begin with, people should realize that chaos cannot be averted and surmounted. By virtue of its immensity, launching a war against it is pointless and self-destructive because it feeds on war."<sup>79</sup> This realization thus necessitates humility and prudence. In this vein, individuals should simply befriend chaos or acclimatize with the rhythm of the cosmos and maintain a critical alliance with it. One of the timeliest initiatives to do for Berardi is to labor for the fashioning of autonomous spaces of happy survival within this chaotic world—a horse pill that humanity should embrace critically and creatively.

How can a vibrational quest be initiated to attune oneself with the chaotic environment? In *Breathing*, survival, i.e., a radical and ethical survival, assumes an active stance. The search for new rhythms or forms of struggle is positively inspired by what the French call orgasm *petite mort* (little death): "an intense momentary ... weakening of consciousness that enables a vision of nothingness and simultaneously opens the possibility of listening to the sound of chaosmosis."<sup>80</sup>

Firstly, the friendship among the people of *Sujonomo N*, in Seoul, South Korea, provides an initial step forward. These people, composed of artists, activists, professors, philosophers, a Buddhist, an anarchist, and young students, regularly meet in two spaces popular in Seoul for alternative learning, food sharing, cultural activities, and meetings.<sup>81</sup> Affirmatively, this

---

<sup>76</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 117.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, 124–139; Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 131.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>81</sup> See Berardi, *Heroes*, 196.

collective inspired and convinced Berardi that learning, friendship, and autonomy are still possible in this hell. In his words "... only our sense of friendship and the pursuit of a project of common research can give us autonomy, and can allow us to create the conditions for a renaissance to follow the apocalypse which we are currently undergoing."<sup>82</sup> Whereas in Deleuze and Guattari, friendship defines the relationship between the philosopher and the concept, in Berardi, friendship presupposes a proximity with the other, as actual people.<sup>83</sup> More specifically, this relation is informed by "]"a sense of solidarity, the perception of belonging to a community, a territory, a shared destiny, and aspired toward the communal search for a common future."<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, these values are rare gems in a community defined by dissolved social relations, fluctuation of the economic order, and debased political revolutionary potentialities.

This paradoxical condition grounds Berardi's theorization of 'Precarious Ethics.' Against the backdrop of semiocapitalism, this new ethics is dynamically guided by uncertainty, transitoriness, and arbitrariness. Compared to other triumphalist or normative formulations of ethics, precarious ethics maintains a more realistic or moderate, yet still valiant project against the onslaught of semiocapitalism. His description of precariousness in *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* is two-fold. Firstly, it deals with the precarity of labor through digital technology and semiocapitalism, as discussed earlier. Secondly, it deals with the environment's precariousness, because Nature is on a vengeance mode and humanity has reverted to survival mode, due to the Enlightenment project's enormous exhaustion of human and natural resources, birthing another form of barbarism.<sup>85</sup> This new dark enlightenment assumes its most distinct appearance in the age of the Anthropocene.

Geologically speaking, the Anthropocene refers to "the impact of man on the planet's environment" as now irreversible" and the "accumulation of greenhouse gas emissions has irreversibly altered the chemical composition of the earth's atmosphere and consequently its living environment."<sup>86</sup> The decomposition of the earthly life or the atmosphere is already irreversible. Parallel to this tragedy, a rehabilitation of the chemical composition of the social psyche, as well as the proliferation of nuclear

---

<sup>82</sup> See *ibid.*, 196.

<sup>83</sup> In *What is Philosophy?*, the other as 'Other,' is conceived beyond anthropological configurations, i.e., "the condition for our passing from one world to another" (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 18). Of course, this definition is implicit in Berardi's writings.

<sup>84</sup> Berardi, *Heroes*, 200.

<sup>85</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 120.

weapons, water and food scarcity, demographic expansions, etc., is already nebulous. Overall, these encompassing features of contemporary society should compel humanity to realize or perceive the detrimental consequences involved in confronting chaos or the impossibility of overcoming chaos. At the G20 Summit in July 2017, many protesters and artists marched under the banner “Welcome 2 Hell.” With a pessimistic tone, Berardi contends: “In the past twenty years the global movement, from Seattle to Genova to Occupy, has tried to stop the hellification of the world. We have marched, we have chanted, we have ... expressed concepts and proclaimed predictions that have been confirmed by every deployment of the global crisis. In return, many of us have been beaten, repressed, imprisoned, and killed. In the end, everybody is now in hell.”<sup>87</sup>

Disturbingly, the Anthropocene poses a problem beyond geology and research methodology.<sup>88</sup> This revolutionary goal poses a significant challenge to philosophy, art, and science. Individually, no philosophical concept, artistic production, scientific function, and even political theory can fully eradicate or neutralize it. But, of course, it may produce a divergent outcome when the three powers of thinking, along with other disciplines and principles, combine to form a radical assemblage. Guattari famously articulates this revolutionary conjunction in *Chaosmosis*: “Psychonanalysis, institutional analysis, film, literature, poetry, innovative pedagogies, town planning and architecture—all the discipline will have to combine their creativity to ward off the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaotic spasms looming on the horizon, and transform them into riches and unforeseen pleasures...”<sup>89</sup>

In the last decade, humanity witnessed the conceptualization of multifaceted and collaborative ways or modes of resistance to unshackle humanity from the market’s dictatorship. One of the innovatively radical ways was launched by the Occupy Movement in 2011. As a post-political revolutionary intervention, the Occupy movement, according to Thomas Nail,

underscores that state and/or semiocapitalism itself is the cause of the current crisis ... it also demands that we start creating some alternatives to the current system here and now, and not wait around for political

---

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 128–129.

<sup>88</sup> See Claire Colebrook, “We Have Always been Post-Anthropocene,” in Richard Grusin ed., *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1–20.

<sup>89</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 135.

representatives or corporations to fix the problems they created.<sup>90</sup>

More specifically, it “launched a campaign to denounce the plague of student loans, but the movement was unable to support a long-lasting action of organized insolvency and sabotage of the debt.”<sup>91</sup> The Occupy started a long process of the reactivation of the cognitive workers’ social body and nervous system. Sadly, despite its post-political capillaries and vigor, the Occupy was unable to effectively launch a resistance at the semiological domain. Of course, semiocapitalism grounds its existence on the totalization of life’s semiological patterns, pracarizes the workings of the brain, and engenders other psycho-social maladies.

Given the debasement of all political avenues for resistance, Berardi claims that there is no political escape from the trap authored by semiocapitalism. This illustrates the sad fate of the Occupy Movement: “Financial absolutism was not shaken by the protests, and indeed only hardened its grip, further destroying social life. Then impotence, humiliation, and despair led people to abandon any sentiment of humanist universalism and turn toward aggression and fascism; chaos invaded social life and the geopolitical map of the world.”<sup>92</sup> The Occupy is only one of the many insufficient socio-political responses that sadly convinces revolutionaries and theorists worldwide that they should look for novel modes and venues of revolution elsewhere. Even though it launched various novel and indirect democratic initiatives, the linguistic channels the participants used must also be re-conceived. Perhaps, a very important lesson can be learned from Deleuze:

Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They’re thoroughly permeated by money ... We’ve got to hijack speech. Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles on noncommunication, circuit breakers, so that we can elude control.<sup>93</sup>

For Berardi, on the other hand, hijacking or destabilizing speech is the task of poetry or poetic language. As a contemporary mutation, semiocapitalism is vastly regulated by algorithms that connect pockets of

---

<sup>90</sup> Thomas, Nail, *Returning to Revolution: Deleuze, Guattari, and the Zapatistas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), viii–ix.

<sup>91</sup> Berardi, *Heroes*, 145.

<sup>92</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 175.

precarious labor and suffocate the social body with chaos. It is only through poetry (poetic language), Berardi underscores, that people can be liberated from semicapitalist suffocation: “Only poetry will soothe the suffering of the engineer’s mind and the poet’s mind, and will act to reverse the financial sphere’s grip upon language.”<sup>94</sup> In this regard, poetry serves as a possible conjunctive vector that would ignite the self-organization of the cognitive workers and the alliance between the engineer and the poet. In *The Uprising* and *Breathing*, Berardi calls for a poetical reactivation of the erotic body of the general intellect as the only pathway of liberation from the oppression of financial capitalism.<sup>95</sup>

Of course, the alliance between the cognitariats and the poets should not be interpreted literally. The “poetic act” is a philosophical style of thinking and living in the semicapitalist abyss. It precariously empowers people to experiment

with the world by reshuffling semiotic patterns ... The act of composing signs (visual, linguistic, musical, and so on) may disclose a space of meaning that is neither preexistent in nature not based on a social convention ... The poetical act is a semiotic excess hinting beyond the limit of conventional meaning, and simultaneously it is a revelation of a possible sphere of experience not yet experienced.<sup>96</sup>

Furthermore, the poetic act advocates a becoming-poetic, which also differentializes and engages with neighboring concepts, disciplines, and events. Hopefully, it could also serve as vector of alliance between other workers, professionals, and the young generation, like the one epitomized by *Sujonomo N.*

In *Breathing*, Berardi elaborates on some paradoxical values or refrains that may engender rhythms that can act as temporary grounds for human relations and existence, namely, ‘humility,’ ‘compassion,’ ‘empathy,’ and ‘friendship.’ Humility refers to the acceptance of the failure of the Enlightenment project. It also teaches us to bravely traverse life without any transcendental reference and blindness to enormous injustices unfolding in society. More importantly, humility frees us from the illusion of utterly governing chaos.

---

<sup>94</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 10.

<sup>95</sup> See *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.



In addition, Berardi emphasizes the significance of empathy in the semiocapitalist world. Since the demography of the young generation and the cognitive workers, today belong to the “generations that have learnt more words from a machine than from their mother,”<sup>97</sup> the resuscitation of empathy is truly a Herculean task. As Berardi writes, “Empathy, the perception of the Other’s body as an extension of one’s own, is under increasing threat. Since neoliberal reformers have put competition at the core of daily life, and since digital connectivity has replaced physical conjunction in the sphere of social communication, the psychocultural conditions of empathy have been undermined.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite a seemingly impossible crop to grow in the decayed semiocapitalist soil, sharing one’s suffering or depression to a fellow worker embodies a kind of rupture, *a la* ‘little death’ for Berardi or ‘deep tiredness’ for Han.<sup>99</sup> It engenders an opening that can fashion both affirmative and negative implications for both parties involved. Optimistically, Berardi recounts:

But women and men can happily walk over this abyss if they understand that friendship resides in the ability to share the illusion of meaning. When the illusion of meaning is shared, it is no longer an illusion: it becomes reality. The bridge over the abyss is the dialogue that allows for the sharing of a vision ... This dialogue is based on refrains of nonattachment, and it emancipates us from the fear of not being. Getting freed from the will to live is the condition for being alive at last. The bridge over the abyss of the absence of meaning can take many forms: falling in love, tenderness, collective creation, hallucination, and movement. These forms give birth to the physical experience of meaning.<sup>100</sup>

From art and ethics (philosophy), Berardi likewise frontlines science as a vital contributor in this revolutionary plot. This resonates with Deleuze

---

<sup>97</sup> Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> Berardi, *Breathing*, 136.

<sup>99</sup> In *The Burnout Society*, Han speaks of deep tiredness, i.e., a kind of tiredness that “loosens the strictures of identity.... This particular in-difference lends them an aura of friendliness.... This tiredness founds a deep friendship and makes it possible to conceive of a community that requires neither belonging nor relation” [Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 32].

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–145; cf. Byung-Chul Han, *The Topology of Violence*, trans. by Amanda Demarco (MA: MIT Press), 2018), 47.

and Guattari's pronouncement in the chapter "Control and Becoming" in *Negotiations* that it is the audacious task of science to discover "new cerebral pathways and ways of thinking"<sup>101</sup> capable of enabling people to breathe within chaos. Whereas mapping the processes and mental activity of the brain serve as science's task, wiring the activity of the collective brain will then be technology's job.<sup>102</sup> Indeed, transhumanism is a new field of exploration for philosophers and humanity alike that can bestow positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, achieving transhuman humanism may perhaps come to fruition when the "conscious conjunction of sensible and sensitive singularities are able to self-organize and find pathways of sympathy, sharing, and collaboration."<sup>103</sup> On the other, this techno-scientific intervention can promote neuro-totalitarianism—a new technologically-mediated domination of "semio-corporations (the media) and psychocorporations (psychopharmacology), nonetheless also invites a process of sabotage and subversion of the dominant mode of mental wiring, opening the way to experimenting with forms of free neuro-psychic concatenation that corresponds to the social processes of self-organizing cognitive work."<sup>104</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, I revisit Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of chaos and chaosmosis both from the historical context of their era and the contemporary period. To explore further their characterization of capitalism vis-a-vis chaos as a universal disaster for thought, I engage with Berardi's different formulations of precarious or apocalyptic ethics. This philosophical intervention aims to probe chaosmosis' relevance and tensions with current predicaments and scholarship to discover new ways of breathing within chaos.

Chaosmosis is the process of critically and creatively transfiguring chaos through philosophy, art, and science to become chaosmotic. Equally, it is the process of reactivating people's revolutionary imagination and capacity for social solidarity towards new horizons and rhythms beyond capitalist geographies. *Sujonomo N*, the Occupy Movement, the poetic act, and neuroplasticity, are chaosmotic interventions that intrepidly provided pathways to rhythmically breathe within chaos. However, it should not be forgotten that all these chaoids or vectors are grounded on an ethics

---

<sup>101</sup> Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 176.

<sup>102</sup> See Berardi, *Heroes*, 204-205; cf. Franco Berardi, *And: Phenomenology of the End* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 313-314.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 204. Of course, this remains a possibility because this sophisticated can be co-opted by multi-national corporations and promote neuro-totalitarianism.

<sup>104</sup> Berardi, *And*, 313-314.

characterized by uncertainty, transitoriness, and arbitrariness. Hence, they are always hunted by the possibility of being co-opted by the system to strengthen itself.

The creation of concepts, percepts, and functives, and the theorization of a precarious ethics, are activities and struggles always-in-the-making. Inopportunistly, these radical processes can reterritorialize into something life-degenerating when their revolutionary rhythms are corrupted by different arborescent structures and other pre-existing quandaries plaguing different territories or milieus; and more importantly, when the populace slavishly or despairingly thinks that the semicapitalist world is a fecund well-spring of thinking's and life's becoming.

Whereas the concept needs conceptual personas, the very act of creation needs mediators. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze remarks,

They can be people—for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists—but things too, even plants or animals ... Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators ... I need my mediators to express myself, and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own ....<sup>105</sup>

At this point, it is crucial to ask: *Who and what are the potential mediators of this research?* Similarly, *what are the next games for the Deleuzo-Guattarian and Berardian philosophies?* This humble research earnestly invites researchers, cultural workers, and revolutionaries to delve deeper into the writings of Deleuze, Guattari, and Berardi in conjunction with the respective projects of other fellow travelers, namely Maurizio Lazzarato,<sup>106</sup> David Cole,<sup>107</sup> Hito Steyerl,<sup>108</sup> and the Raqs Media Collective<sup>109</sup>; as well as kindred alleyways, such as neuropsychanalysis, cybernetics, new materialism, and even critical plant studies. In *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, Berardi describes what should be done in the years to come:

---

<sup>105</sup> Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 125.

<sup>106</sup> See Maurizio Lazzarato, *Capital Hates Everyone: Fascism or Revolution* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2021). Cf. Geert Lovink, *Stuck On the Platform: Reclaiming the Internet* (Valiz/Making Public Series, 2022) and Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: is There No Alternative?* (UK: Zero Books, 2009).

<sup>107</sup> See David Cole, *Education, the Anthropocene, and Deleuze/Guattari* (London and Boston: Brill, 2022).

<sup>108</sup> See for example, her artistic production, "How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational.MOV File." (2013)

<sup>109</sup> See The Raqs Media Collective <<https://www.raqsmediacollective.net/>>.

The project for the next twenty years is to dismantle and reprogramme the meta-machine, creating a common consciousness and a common technical platform for the cognitive workers of the world ... Building a common consciousness and spreading the consciousness of a possible social solidarity among neuro-workers is the task for the next decade, and the ethical awakening of millions of engineers, artists, and scientists is the only chance of averting a frightening regression, whose contours we are glimpsing today.<sup>110</sup>

Befriending chaos, breathing within the suffocating semi-capitalist world, and diagramming a collectivity-to-come are arduous and paradoxical revolutionary tasks without conclusions. They are likewise defined by a nomadic mapping of new chaoids, territories, and conjunctions, without a radiant light awaiting at the end of the tunnel. A revolution's exhaustive and paradoxical characteristics are sometimes neutralized when it inspires the hopeless, disturbs the thoughtless, and reconstructs people's relationship with the world.<sup>111</sup> Inevitably, there are unfortunate times when it is conceptualized as a mere anthropological self-optimization, which is also one of the cornerstones that fortifies capitalism. Given the complexity of contemporary experiences, revolutionaries should learn how to pause and linger occasionally to search for differential gaps and uncharted zones of becoming and, more importantly, to rethink their principles, activities, and trajectories. It should likewise be fueled by hope, no matter how dystopian it is.<sup>112</sup> A revolution uninformed by hope is nothing but a bare activity devoid of rhythm and virtuality. Ultimately, a revolution, which may come in different names, should advocate for the cultural mutation of thinking, bodies, and relations. Provocatively, Guattari leaves everyone a life-time puzzle to unravel: "how do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity—if it ever had it—a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all

---

<sup>110</sup> Franco Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London and New: Verso, 2019), 238–239.

<sup>111</sup> See Raniel Reyes, *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of 'Becoming-Revolutionary'* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 218.

<sup>112</sup> Deleuze's theorization of *pietas* is defined by dystopian hope. *Pietas* refers to the "ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move. We need both creativity and a people" (Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 176). In the same chapter, Deleuze rhetorically writes, "It's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons (Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 178). See Berardi, *Heroes*, 215.

life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?"<sup>113</sup>

*Department of Philosophy  
Research Center for Culture, Arts, and Humanities  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- Badiou, Alain, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. by David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2010).
- Berardi, Franco, *And: Phenomenology of the End* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2015).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2015).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London and New York, Verso, 2019).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide* (London and New York: Verso, 2015).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, ed. by Erik Empson & Stevphen Shukaitis, trans. by Arianna Bove, Erik Empson, Michael Goddard, Giuseppina Mecchia, Antonella Schintu, and Steve Wright (London: Minor Compositions, 2009).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. by Francesca Cadel and Guiseppina Mecchia (CA: Semiotext(e), 2009).
- Cole, David, *Education, the Anthropocene, and Deleuze/Guattari* (London and Boston: Brill, 2022).
- Colebrook, Claire, *Anthropocentric Feminism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Negotiations*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983).

---

<sup>113</sup> Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 119–120.

- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. by Constantin Boundas, trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- Fisher, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (UK: Zero Books, 2009).
- Young, Eugene, Genosko, Gary, and Watson Janell, *The Deleuze & Guattari Dictionary* (London and New York, 2013).
- Guattari, Felix, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. by Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Machinic Unconscious: Essays in Schizoanalysis*, trans. by Taylor Adkins (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2011).
- Han, Byung-Chul. *The Agony of Eros*, trans. by Erik Butler (MA: MIT Press, 2017).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Burnout Society*, trans. by Erik Butler (CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Expulsion of the Other: Society, Perception and Communication Today*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (UK: Polity Press, 2018).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingerin*, trans. by Daniel Steuer (UK: Polity Press, 2017).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Topology of Violence*, trans. by Amanda Demarco (MA: MIT Press), 2018).
- Lazzarato, Maurizio, *Capital Hates Everyone: Fascism or Revolution* (CA: Semiotext(e), 2021).
- Lovink, Geert, *Stuck on the Platform: Reclaiming the Internet*
- Nail, Thomas, *Returning to Revolution: Deleuze, Guattari and Zapatismo* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).
- Parr, Adrian ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).
- Plotnitsky, Arkady, "Chaosmologies: Quantum Field Theory, Chaos and Thought in Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*" in *Paragraph*, 29:2 (July 2006), *Deleuze and Science*, 40–56.
- Radder, Hans ed., *The Commodification of Academic Research: Science and the Modern University* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2010).

Reyes, Raniel, *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of 'Becoming-Revolutionary'* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020).

Steyerl, Hito, "How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File." (2013)

## What is Levinasian in Sustainability?: Sustainability in the Economy of Being through Levinas' *Le Tiers*

---

**Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela**

**Abstract:** This study is motivated by the rising need to express the idea of sustainability as a form of ethical responsibility. Oftentimes discussed in the context of environmental conservation, I intend to incorporate the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to explain how the other Others (which he calls the Third—*le tiers*), in its diverse forms, can become a conduit to uphold sustainability for the human kind, and more particularly for the next generations. While the usual idea of sustainability seems to inhibit Levinas' idea of transcendence, I argue in this paper that it is nevertheless needed as human transcendence first occurs in the schema of totality and the economy of being.

**Keywords:** Levinas, economy of being, SDGs, sustainability

Sustainability is a theme that is not a stranger among social scientists because it is generally concerned about the supposed alignment of environmental preservation with economic development. It is a common target among corporations, particularly in the exercise of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects, which gain revenue credits; and of industries because of government requirements to preserve the environment. For the global citizen, sustainability is a consumer-driven concern that somehow upholds justice since one as though exercise freedom in acquiring goods while keeping in mind that there are others with whom we share these goods and that there are future generations that should also enjoy the blessings of our planet.

Sustainability started to be legitimized as a global concern, in the midst of “technologization/computerization of industries,” in 1987 when the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined it as, “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet



## 170 WHAT IS

their own needs.”<sup>1</sup> Torelli rephrases it to show how its three core elements should be harmonized:

sustainability recalls first of all the environmental sphere (**environmental protection**) and a challenge to respect our resources (**economic growth**), firstly, to respect ourselves and our life, and secondly, to respect the next generation and their planet (**social inclusion**).<sup>2</sup>

To properly implement the above, Krososky cites companies’ best practices to echo six factors of sustainability, namely: climate change, environment, innovation, technology, people, and ethics/accountability.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>4</sup> which were also called the Global Goals. These goals are, “a

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals,” *United Nations SDG*, <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda-retired/#:~:text=On%201%20January%202016%2C%20the,Summit%20%E2%80%94%20officially%20came%20into%20force>>.

<sup>2</sup> R. Torelli, “Sustainability, responsibility and ethics: different concepts for a single path,” *Social Responsibility Journal*, 17:5 (2021), 719–739, <<https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2020-0081>>.

<sup>3</sup> A. Krososky, “What are the six factors of sustainability and how do we adhere to them?,” in *Greenmatters* (March 2021), <<https://www.greenmatters.com/p/six-factors-of-sustainability>>.

<sup>4</sup> The Sustainable Goals are as follows: 1. **No Poverty**: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, 2. **Zero Hunger**: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, 3. **Good Health and Well-being**: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, 4. **Quality Education**: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, 5. **Gender Equality**: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, 6. **Clean Water and Sanitation**: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, 7. **Affordable and Clean Energy**: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, 8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth**: Promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, 9. **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, 10. **Reduced inequality**: Reduce inequality within and among countries, 11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities**: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, 12. **Responsible Consumption and Production**: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, 13. **Climate Action**: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, 14. **Life Below Water**: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, 15. **Life on Land**: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss, 16. **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, 17. **Partnerships to Achieve the Goal**: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. See also Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guillaume Lafortune

universal call to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.”<sup>5</sup> This picks up from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which initiated the path to battle poverty, thereby cultivating new areas of concern that are supposed to be acted upon by all countries, the poor, middle-income and rich, recognizing that economic progress is a common interest of nations since it will guarantee improvement in the quality of life and the protection of the planet. To be more specific, it is in SDGs where all countries find a commonplace to work together for education, health, social protection, job opportunities, climate change, and environmental protection.

The seventeen goals are integrated, with each area capable of affecting others. In this case, these may be grouped into three categories according to the elements of development: Economic, Social and Environmental. Other institutions that collaborate with UN, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have aligned the SDGs into five pillars, namely, people, prosperity, peace, planet and partnerships.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the SDGs lack legal binding. However, it is expected from the member nations of the UN that their governments should build national frameworks in line with these goals. Each bears the duty to monitor and evaluate the progress of their implementation of the goals, which require collecting quality, updated and transparent data. These national evaluation reports shall be cascaded on the regional level to contribute to global monitoring and review process. This matter is annually brought to the level of the UN Secretary General through an SDG Progress Report.

Obviously, these efforts need to be funded both by the governments and the private sector, and as estimated by the UN, in trillions of dollars. (If we assume that such projection was done in 2015, inflation and all that happened in the world between 2015 and 2023 must have bloated this at a large rate.) The means (i.e., financial means) of SDG implementation are monitored and evaluated according to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, an official document coming from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. This is needed because the 2030 Goals have expanded to involve all nations and would need the involvement and investment of private institutions. The implementation of SDGs means a more pressing financial concern as compared to the implementation of the

---

and Grayson Fuller, *The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024* (Paris: Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2024), <<https://doi.org/10.25546/108572>>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals.”

<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund, “Sustainable Development Goals,” *IMF Website* (n.d.), <<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/SDG>>.

MDGs which was only meant for developing countries and addressed only by governments.

Nevertheless, the challenge to sustainability is not to look at what is missing but to begin with what is present. Resources are available and, “there are far more enough savings in the world to finance the new agenda.”<sup>7</sup> The proper way to start is to direct available resources as investments that support sustainable development. Public and private sectors should be mobilized to find domestic and international sources, with official development assistance, especially for countries in most need.

The Global Goals of 2030 therefore influence nations to work for this sustainable development, and by their mandates, create policies that encourage all sectors to follow the call to sustainability. Private companies, for example, already consider the SDGs as part of their business development agenda, as governments provide privileges such as tax deductions if they embark on the goals, and that the goals by themselves also guarantee institutional longevity. Commonly, sustainability is a noted agenda in companies’ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In 2019, the Governance Accountability Institute (G&A) noted that 90% of large companies (S&P 500 Index) have published sustainability and responsibility reports, since it is a growing stakeholder expectation. It is said that 73% of investors are looking for environmental and social responsibility in business and that 77% of consumers are more likely to support brands committed to making the world a better place.<sup>8</sup> Responses vary, such as when Novozymes, a world leader in biological solutions, has developed technology that reduces water for waste treatment. Clothing brands like H&M and Uniqlo use sustainable materials for making clothes (in the Philippines we have Bayo as representative), Starbucks get their coffee only from ethical source, support green building infrastructure and hire veterans and refugees are among the examples of how private businesses have responded to the call to sustainability.

Educational institutions also play their part. UNESCO states that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are distinctly at the forefront of the promotion of SDGs, serving as a benchmark for other economic sectors. Since universities and colleges are the vessels of higher learning and research, they obviously contribute to social progress by fostering SDG4 (quality education), and in the same aggressive manner put forward SDG4 (gender equality) and SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities). HEI’s teaching and learning help female social mobility, with research that identifies gender equality

---

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, “Sustainable Development Goals.”

<sup>8</sup> Jane Courtneil, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability: What’s the Difference?,” *Green Business Bureau* (2022), <<https://greenbusinessbureau.com/business-function/executive/corporate-social-responsibility-and-sustainability-whats-the-difference/>>.

gaps, their reasons, and consequences. HEIs also fight against sexual violence, abuse and harassment on campuses with proactive policies and resources.<sup>9</sup> As per sustaining cities and communities, HEIs foster the goals from the physical plant through the integration of campus into the urban environment, policy, and curriculum making by aligning the institutional goals up to the curriculum to the SDGs, and collaboration by integrating local and regional contexts in their research to solve urban problems. These are already evidenced by UNESCO's collaboration with Times of Higher Education that identified key dynamics and good practices of SDG11.

### Philosophy Steps In

The growing concern on sustainability has also caught the attention of philosophers. Tim Delaney (2012) in his short introduction to a special issue on environmental sustainability in *Philosophy Now* mentioned how the issue can generate questions concerning social and physical conditions as they affect nature and humanity, and how ecosystem can hold, endure or bear the weight of many social and natural forces that may compromise its healthy operation.<sup>10</sup> Delaney raised these concerns:

- Can the Earth sustain its current human population, or the population which on current projections, could be expected in 50,100 or 200 years' time?
- Could it sustain a good proportion of other animal species currently inhabiting it, or are we beginning to see a mass extinction like the one at the end of the Cretaceous?
- Can it sustain our expanding industrial civilization without undergoing catastrophic further climate change?
- If not, is there anything we can still do to avert disaster?

Rising philosophical concerns about sustainability are mainly focused on the environment, mainly because the earth is our first provider. It is the vessel of the food that we eat. Gradually, environmental ethics have become an expanse field to cover ruminations about the consumption and abuse of living organisms, from flora to fauna. Nevertheless, there is a rising trend that tackle sustainability in business ethics, on how the goals may sustain both the resources and the business itself. In the mainstream we hear

---

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, "Higher Education and the SDGs," UNESCO (2023), <<https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/the-contribution-of-higher-education-to-the-sdgs/>>.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Delaney, "Sustainability," in *Philosophy Now*, 88 (January/February 2012), <<https://philosophynow.org/issues/88/Sustainability>>.

Roger Scruton, Peter Singer, Jim Moran, even Aristotle and Kant to name a few. But for this afternoon, I intend to share what could be relevant pieces of contribution from the French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas.

Ideas that may consist of a Levinasian idea of sustainability are mainly derivative or hermeneutic. For one, there was no direct and argumentative note about environmental ethics or at least how to be ethical to the world. The most that he would talk about that might pass for a note on environmental ethics would be his note on *The Paradox of Morality* that, “the ethical extends to all living things.”<sup>11</sup> Another would be the story about his fondness for a street dog he named Bobby in the essay *The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights*. Both works derivatively note that the world beyond humans may be portrayed as an Other that calls for responsibility, only that the human holds the paragon of ethics. Nevertheless, Levinasian scholarship has vast articulations on environmental ethics by enriching hermeneutics of his notions of transcendence, infinity, the Other and justice. To name a few, we have contributions by Diane Perpich who wrote about how the problematic nonhuman regard of animals (or nature not having a face) is better viewed to provide an inspired environmental ethics through the political and not the ethical, since it is in human sociality where one thinks about what is good for both humans and animals.<sup>12</sup> Peter Atterton in exploring Levinas’ remarks about animals figured out what Levinas might refer to “the humanism of the other man” that opens the ethical dimension more than human interest and desire, considering that animals qualify as radically Other, way beyond any reductionist distinction.<sup>13</sup> We also have Barbara Davy who argued about the need to critically cut through the idea of simply speaking of a Face for a nonhuman, which is possible only through an ethic extraneous to Levinas’ transcendent ethics that can radically go beyond “otherwise than being.”<sup>14</sup>

This project hopes to contribute to the discussion by seeking for Levinasian sources that may ethically enrich and critique the contemporary notion of sustainability. It can provide as a meta-ethic that hopes to humanize, nay, even transcend such anthropocentrism by looking for the meritorious significance of nature, the environment, and the animals—the

---

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, Alison Ainley, Peter Hughes, and Tamra Wright, “The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas,” in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (ed.) *The Provocation of Levinas Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge, 1988), 172.

<sup>12</sup> Diane Perpich, “5 Scarce Resources? Levinas, Animals, and the Environment,” *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2008), 150–176, <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779784-008>>.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Atterton, “Levinas and Our Moral Responsibility Toward Other Animals,” in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 54:6 (2011), 633–649.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Jane Davy, “An other face of ethics in Levinas,” in *Ethics and the Environment*, 12:1 (2007), 39–66.

profound nonhumans that we certainly regard as Otherwise than Humans that blaringly call for human responsibility. Consequently, this meta-ethical inquiry also hopes to elaborate what it means to be just in the context of human sociality.

The title already raised the main question, “What is Levinasian in sustainability?” We shall address this by looking into three concerns. First is the exploration of what and why it should be sustained. This shall address the issue of consumption and nourishment through the metaphor of the tamarisk in the work *Heidegger, Gagarin and us*. Second is to posit such nonhuman implements in the ethical scenario through its regard as an other Other, or the Third; and in the context of sustainability, the one that can also nourish others. Finally, we hope to articulate how this Levinasian view can provide authentic ethical regard of nature that can improve the quality of life of all the organisms in this planet.

### **The Tamarisk: Rooted yet Growing**

*Heidegger, Gagarin and Us* is an essay alluding to the feat of Yuri Gagarin, a cosmonaut who was able to defy the rootedness of gravity and being comfortable in a place. Levinas here provides a caricature and criticism of his time, by talking about how technology can make or break humanity, suspiciously pointing its philosophical roots to the ontological attitude in favor of presence, dwelling and enrootedness. Generally, the essay is a criticism of the contemporary way of thinking and living –how humanity could be so fascinated to things and the world, that their rediscovery would mean a useless emptying, losing, and falling short of realizing their true significance. In a more specific and philosophic sense, this appraisal is directed to Heidegger and Heideggerians whose ontology gave a very fond treatment to “there” in the concept of “being-there” (Dasein). For Levinas, over-attachment to presence developed an intellectual attitude that exploits and demystifies both the world and human becoming, eventually stifling the drive to conquer our ethical sluggishness.

Despite the critique, it is remarkable that Levinas mentioned about the tamarisk, one of the rare individual trees planted in the Bible, described in “all its freshness and color to charm the imagination in the midst of so much peregrination, across so much desert.”<sup>15</sup> Levinas however warns us to look beyond the alluring image as it is an acronym, with three letters that when written in Hebrew are initials for Food, Drink and Shelter: “three things

---

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us,” *Difficult Freedom Essays on Judaism* (USA: The Athlone Press, 1990), 233.

necessary to man which offers to man.”<sup>16</sup> Explicitly, Levinas designated the role of the earth as the vessel of implements, because “the earth is for that,” and that “man is his own master in order to serve man.”<sup>17</sup> The tamarisk is used to symbolize the earth as a provider and must be respected in its own.

As a critical essay on technology, Levinas stresses the need to elevate the role of implements as ushers to transcendence, with tools belonging to the world, yet brings one forth out of the place,

technology does away with the privileges of this rootedness and the related sense of exile ... Technology wrenches us out of the Heideggerian world and the superstitions surrounding Place. From this point on, an opportunity appears to us: to perceive men outside the situation in which they are placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity.<sup>18</sup>

But in the ethical recognition of the human face, Levinas points out that this profound anthropocentrism should also learn to respect the mystery of the earth. In verbatim, “let us remain masters of the mystery that the earth breaths.” Ethical humans should then also give space, respect the place where organism dwell in and for themselves. “The plant is not enough of a plant to define an intimacy with the world. A little humanity distances us from nature, a great deal of humanity brings us back.”<sup>19</sup> As objects we enjoy while being comfortable in place, humans are also called to respect the nonhumans, since the enjoyment of the Place and its implements also call for its trusting and keeping. “And man, the keeper of Being will derive from this grace his existence and his truth.”<sup>20</sup>

### The Many Thirds

Levinasian scholarship have contributed to the ethical discussion of Levinas, who by hindsight have developed responses to bring his philosophical plantilla to bigger discussions. Early Levinasian scholarship has pointed to the notion of infinite responsibility as problematic since Levinas himself admitted how the condition of totality inhibits an exclusive relationship of the Self to a single Other. In *Totality and Infinity*, he mentioned how the encounter of the Face of the Other is disrupted by another

---

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

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

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 233–234.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

other, thereby adding a third persona in the ethical scenario which disrupts the supposed extent to the first Other (Autrui) and the disbursement of other responsibilities to all others (les autres). This introduced the problem of the other Others.

In order to accommodate the *autre*, Levinas introduces justice that would allow the Self to be responsible to the Other and for all others. Levinas addressed the problem of justice by the arbitration of institutions, particularly by the State. Governments should provide mechanisms of justice that transcend egoistic interests. Wyschogrod<sup>21</sup> and Awerkamp pointed out rhetorical and metaphysical problems as Levinas seemingly raised a conflict between infinite responsibility and the rationale of justice, which further divided ethics and politics. Add to the problematique the threat of violence in the split of ethics and politics.<sup>22</sup> Derrida reverberates this by posing how violence is nevertheless present in Levinas' very attempt to negate the violence of ontology (which is a violence towards violence), and of how such negation occurs in totality and more particularly in the economy of being.<sup>23</sup>

Levinas recognizes this problem of violence, that he notes in *Philosophy, Justice and Love* that institutions as embodied ethical subjects must be cautious because there is an element of violence in the state, that can nevertheless be settled in life between states through negotiation and speech (Saying).<sup>24</sup> And this hard social truth, Levinas radically confronted (i.e., addressed) by hastening the description of responsibility as characterized by separation, ordination and height, with its radical manifestation by patience, substitution and even dying for the Other. He puts this point forward in other works and interviews, with a special stress, that the politics rising from this complex ethics require the wisdom of love.

Some Levinasians from the next wave (1981-2000) provided kind support by demonstrating diverse directions to see the role of the Third as a

---

<sup>21</sup> Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: the Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974).

<sup>22</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, "In the Name of the Other," *Is it Righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, trans. by Maureen Gedney (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 193. Commentators like Zygmunt Bauman and Don Awerkamp opine that ethics is always personal (focused on the individual) while politics is communal (as focused on the system). According to them, the inclusion of justice in the Levinasian paradigm puts up a kind of violence since it limits the infinite responsibility to the *Autrui* (in order to accommodate the *autre*). See Zygmunt Bauman, "Morality begins at Home: or the Rocky Road to Justice," in *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 46-70, and Don Awerkamp, *Ethics and Politics* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Claire Elise Katz and Lara Trout (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-88.

<sup>24</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy, Justice and Love," in *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 106.



functional component in putting ethics in politics, i.e., making ethics work in the economy of being. Bauman who upholds that “charity begins at home” capped off his critique of Levinas by a supplementary remark that justice can be resolved as an ethical problem by thinking of it as having a self-correcting mechanism, thereby accepting its fluxes as determined by the ethical encounter.<sup>25</sup> Llewelyn in finding appositions between Levinas and Derrida noted that political peace can only be achieved by exceeding pure political thinking. Burggraave provided possibilities to understand how Levinas’ ethics fundamentally occurs in the realities and finitudes of human situation (which is what the economy of being is all about), where responsibilities are oftentimes entrusted to institutions that are called to find “the wisdom of nations in the wisdom of love.”<sup>26</sup>

In such setup, it is then possible to find the Third as an agent of responsibility, which could be a serendipitous source of ethical reciprocity. In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas notes the eventual proximity (i.e., ethical space) between the other and the other other or the Third:

The third party is other than the neighbor, but also another neighbor, and also a neighbor of the other, and not simply his fellow ... The other stands in a relationship with the third party, for whom I cannot entirely answer, even if I alone answer, before any question for my neighbor. The other and the third party, my neighbors, contemporaries of one another, put distance between me and the other and the third party. ‘Peace, peace to the neighbor and the one far-off’ (Isaiah 57:19)—we now understand the point of this apparent rhetoric.<sup>27</sup>

The epiphanies of the other and the third create an interplay between justice (through comparison, assembly, and order in coexistence)<sup>28</sup> and responsibility (and even substitution).<sup>29</sup> While there is full reason and sense in the arbitrary (and thematizing) work of justice, Levinas mentions that the very same work of justice brings forth the more ancient wisdom that justice

---

<sup>25</sup> Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 50–51.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Burggraave, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*, trans. by Jeffrey Bloechl (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 157.

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

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

passes by justice in being responsible for the other. More than the equality implied by justice, responsibility which occurs in facing the other, diffuses stringent arbitrations. This is so because in the social sphere, the other facing me assumes a more ambiguous otherness, as a much more unique other who could also have another ethical relation with others. "The other is from the first the brother of all the other men. The neighbor that obsesses me is already a face, both comparable and incomparable, a unique face and in relationship with faces, which are visible in the concern for justice."<sup>30</sup>

With the coming of the Third and in the midst of sociality, the absolute asymmetry of responsibility and substitution is challenged. Even if it is Levinasianly clear that I am responsible for the other and all others and that I substitute myself for the other and no other can substitute for me, Levinas notes that the coming of the Third prompts a correction of the asymmetry of ethical proximity:

the relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at. There is weighing, thought, objectification and thus a decree in which my anarchic relationship with illeity is betrayed, but in which is conveyed before us. There is betrayal of my anarchic relation with illeity, but also a new relationship with it.<sup>31</sup>

This anarchic relation with illeity (i.e., disruptive and epiphanic opportunity for ethical transcendence) is once again proven since it is always possible for others to be ethical subjects themselves, much so that I may be regarded as an other by the others—for myself. Levinas then exclaims, "thanks to God, I am an other for the others."<sup>32</sup> In sociality, and by illeity, the neighbor that faced me and I looked after now presents oneself, "and there is also justice for me."<sup>33</sup> This idea opens the possibility for reciprocity, while maintaining asymmetry in ethical proximity, because even if my responsibility is never motivated by the response of the one that I helped, that other and many others are also in the face of their others, of which I may be a part.

It is from this maze of sociality where there is promise of a good Levinasian ethics of sustainability. I see the ethical promise of the Third as

---

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

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

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

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

the key to find a Levinasian idea of sustainability, either through the environment<sup>34</sup> or communal mechanisms of justice<sup>35</sup> and mutual giving.<sup>36</sup>

A good articulation of the Third, as subject to human responsibility ushers the potential for them to also become a responsible third. This is when ethics can build politics where social justice becomes an effective prompt for all humans to also benefit from the goods of the earth. Van Roermund stretches this in classifying thirds to the Infinite Other, the Arbiter and the Polity as a plural self.<sup>37</sup> In all of these types, the third is taken to possibly portray a role in sustainability, with the first as a nonhuman subject and agent (with the environment well-kept as capable of caring for the humankind), second as the institutional subject that is ready to preserve and uphold social justice with full accountability, and third as individuals (i.e., of many responsible selves which are committed to serve and protect resources for the many others of the future). This view of the Third ushers the care of Thirds and the Thirds caring, where the environment is curated with respect, and social justice is implemented by an encouraging mechanism that does not only give back but more importantly pass acts of goodness to others.

### **Levinasian Ethics looking through the SDGs: Letting live, letting be, letting grow**

And so let us return to the SDGs with a Levinasian reality check. We might as well ask how far have we been in our strife to achieve the goals?

---

<sup>34</sup> See Martin Betsan, "Taking Responsibility into all Matter: Engaging Levinas for the climate of the 21st century," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 48:4 (2016), 418–435, <DOI:10.1080/00131857.2015.1044927>; William Edelglass, James Hatley, and Christian Diehm (eds.), *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought*, (USA: Duquesne University Press, 2012); Michael Welsch, "From the Interpersonal to the Environmental: Extending the Ethics of Levinas to Human Ecology," *Human Ecology Review* 5:2 (1998): 49–57. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24707192>>; Eric S. Nelson, "Levinas and Adorno: Can there be an Ethics of Nature?," *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought* (USA: Duquesne University Press, 2012), 109–133; and Nino Antadze, "Who is the Other in the age of the Anthropocene? Introducing the Unknown Other in climate justice discourse," *The Anthropocene Review*, 6:1–2 (2019), 38–54.

<sup>35</sup> C. Groves, "Sustainability and the future: Reflections on the ethical and political significance of sustainability," *Sustainability Science*, 14 (2019), 915–924, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00700-0>>.

<sup>36</sup> Annabel Herzog, "Levinas on the Social: Guilt and the City," *Theory Culture and Society* (2014), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414523479>>.

<sup>37</sup> Bert Van Roermund, "The Third Third: Levinas and 'We,'" in *Etica & Politica/Ethics & Politics*, XXIII:1 (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2021), 203–220, <<http://hdl.handle.net/10077/32029>>.

The United Nations' SDG Report of 2024 notes that nations are, "severely off track to realize the 2030 Agenda."<sup>38</sup> Out of 169 targets, 135 are assessable using global trend data, 34 lack sufficient data for global trend analysis. And within assessable targets, only 17 percent are projected to be achievable by 2030.<sup>39</sup>

Challenges arise due to the economic disruption brought by COVID-19 and current geopolitical conflicts among some nations. For 2024, it has been noted that inequalities and climate crises continue to arise, biodiversity is destroyed, and the promotion of gender equality remains disputable.<sup>40</sup>

In the UN SDG Report of 2024, SDGs 1, 2, and 10 are taking a toll with an additional 23 million people under extreme poverty, over 100 million people (1 in 10 people) suffering from hunger in 2022, and 7 in 10 children worldwide lack social protection coverage in 2023. With the slow per-capita GDP growth among nations, food prices increased four-fold (from years 2015-2019 to 2022); there are food crises (SDGs 2 and 12) that bring health setbacks (SDG 3), which is evidenced by stunting of 1 out of 5 children under age 5, 4.5 billion people not covered by health services (2021), and the increase of life expectancy.

Access to water, sanitation and energy (SDGs 6, 7) is under speed in development, with 2 billion people projected to still live without safe drinking water, 3 billion still without safely managed sanitation, 1.4 billion still without basic hygiene services, 660 million still without electricity access and 1.8 billion still without clean cooking fuels and technologies.<sup>41</sup>

Education (SDG 4) remains challenged, evidenced by the global decline of math and reading skills among students. There has been slow progress in upper secondary school completion from 1.3 percentage points (2010-2015) to 0.9 percentage points, with Oceania experiencing negative growth. This is brought about by problems in the educational system, lack of facilities, and the living conditions of the students. UN also reports that over 20 percent of primary schools lack clean sanitation facilities for girls.<sup>42</sup>

Gender equality is slowly fostered with only 56 percent (among 69 countries) of married or in-union women aged 15-49 years old being capable of deciding on their own sexual and reproductive health, only 40 percent of women's hold of global employment and only 27.5 percent hold of

---

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>>

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

<sup>40</sup> United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 Key Findings* (2024), <[https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SDGs\\_Report\\_Key\\_Findings\\_2024.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SDGs_Report_Key_Findings_2024.pdf)>.

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

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

managerial positions (2022). According to the same report, it is projected that the projected equality will need 176 more years to achieve.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, the results reported by UN can also be cross-checked with the contemporary founts of knowledge which subjected the implementation of the SDGs in a critical check. In a 2019 study, Moyer and Hennen note that 43.2% of country indicators have already hit target values. Most rapid developments have been made in the areas of fighting extreme poverty, primary school completion, access to safe water and electricity. The slowest are in addressing underweight children, child mortality, completion of secondary education and safe sanitation. With a projected improvement only to 53.8% by 2023, this report generally implies that there is only limited progress in achieving the goals.<sup>44</sup>

National Geographic also observed that limited progress has been made with the SDGs. Using the data reported by the UN, it reiterates that many people are now living healthier lives compared to the time when the MDGs and SDGs were introduced. This is evidenced by the rise in the percentage of the worldwide count of live births assisted by a skilled health professional from 62% from 2000 to 2005 to 80% from 2012 to 2017. There have also been improvements in poverty reduction, with a decrease of 1% by the year 2017 of the year 2015 global rate of 9.2% of workers with families to support making less than 1.90 USD. There also remains undernourishment which actually increased from 777 million people in 2015 to 800 million in 2018. Slow progress have also been stated about gender equality, with only Denmark showing progress in achieving the goals. This report observes that European countries are most capable of catching up with the SDGs, while those in the sub-Sahara are at the lowest. The overall score for all countries is 65.7, which is at a poor level.<sup>45</sup>

Another study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2022 demonstrates a lack of progress, especially in poverty reduction, eliminating inequalities and exclusion, and narrowing the gender gap in wages. Inequities in education and unhealthy habits continue to deprive both youth and adults of acquiring basic skills to becoming “active, responsible and engaged citizens.”<sup>46</sup>

---

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

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan D. Moyer and Steve Hedden. “Are we on the right path to achieve the sustainable development goals?” *World Development*, 127 (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104749>>.

<sup>45</sup> National Geographic, “Sustainable Development Goals,” *National Geographic Website*, <<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/sustainable-development-goals/>>.

<sup>46</sup> OECD, *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets*, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2022) <<https://doi.org/10.1787/af4b630d-en>>.

With the above, OECD countries (mostly European) still need to work more to meet 21 targets by 2030, and that it remains impossible for the targets due by 2020 to be achieved by all these member countries.

If the reports, both by the UN and other institutions, spanning from 2019 to 2024, our general reading should consider the rise, fall and restoration of the world economy and quality of life brought about by COVID. Before and after COVID, it is evident that arriving at the goals of 2030 is taking its toll. In its report, UN recognizes that we are far from the goals, and there needs to promote peace, solidarity and implementation of direct measures to catch up. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) suggests that the SDG agenda should be extended to 2050 in order to ensure proper financing, reinforce international peace and security, harness science, empower youth, enhance global governance.<sup>47</sup>

Reaching the goals certainly needs more time. The general principles set by the United Nations provide careful stipulations about the principles and provisions for evaluation, as well as strategies for funding. This calls for meticulous mindwork involving diplomacy and policy making, which are implemented in the underlying units, such as governments and private sectors. As it lacks legal binding, it remains a guiding principle, with the mandate merely depending on the law-making powers of states. UN operates on the level of providing guideposts and support, and Levinasianly, is an arbiter for this environmental and social justice. Yet, the role of justice must supersede the rhetoric of systems. While the precise indices graphically represent the movement in achieving the 2030 goals, what remains unanswered is the question about its relevance to addressing the many thirds. Are the 2030 goals truly geared to provide for the people of the future? If today's progress is insufficient to address the needs of the others of our times, could we truly guarantee that we will achieve the same goals for those beyond the present? Finally, with all these data that describe the development, in what ways can such quantification offer approaches to be responsible and just to the people and the planet?

In *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, we find Levinas constantly reminding us about the possibility of overriding the mechanisms of justice in case it loses itself in the middle of the operative structures it created. Levinas supplements this with a note: justice "must not be taken for an anonymous law of the 'human forces' governing an impersonal totality."<sup>48</sup> For Levinas,

---

<sup>47</sup> Yuki Kimura, "UN Sustainable Development Report 2024," *Global Society World News* (19 June 2024), <[<sup>48</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, \*Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence\*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis \(Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009\), 161.](https://www.globalsociety.earth/post/un-sustainable-development-report-2024?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwpbi4BhByEiwAMC8JnfHRL-nPjNl5Y_tBTrFmtLKC-1bPGZJvGAXcku_zS16e4XukVaXK5RoCw6UQAvD_BwE.></a>></p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

the measures of justice should resist the assemblage of fixtures because it should always be dis-inter-ested:

In no way is justice a degradation of obsession, a degeneration that would be produced in the measure that for empirical reasons the initial double would become a trio. But the contemporaneousness of the multiple is tied about the distinction of two: justice remains justice only, in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest. The equality of all is borne by my inequality, the surplus of my duties over my rights. The forgetting of the self moves justice.<sup>49</sup>

The ethical space must keep its enigmatic ambivalence so it may always resist the enchainment of the Infinite and transcendent and keep within ethical responsibility the possibility of being a gift. Sustainability then means finding creative means to be able to keep others, and if within the socio-political sphere, that means finding the “wisdom of love at the service of love.”<sup>50</sup>

Arbitrations of justice should have a dynamic mechanism that is capable of putting itself into question, as systems are by themselves thematizations that hamper the natural act of letting live and letting be—letting grow. While this strife for universal prosperity is industrially driven, we throw the real question on whether these goals truly cascade to the grassroots in recognition of their culture, lifeworld, livelihood and even human rights. The strife towards the SDGs must remain true in protecting alterities, such as the identities and welfare of the indigenous, the dignity of the poor, and the rights of women and children, to name a few.

Finally, the call for sustainability which covers both environmental and social justice is a disruption of the enjoyment of consuming things in a place. It heralds otherness that should be respected in the midst of development, since the subject shares this rooted place of implements with others. If at all the good life is a sincere human concern that goes beyond the Self, sustainability should be understood within the context of sharing this planet not only with the others that we have now, but also with those of the future. Sustainability becomes an ethical expression through respect that puts aside self-interest for the Other and all others, including that non-human

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

other that it may also provide for the future others. This calls for an acquired sense of social justice and of a shared world.

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

## References

- Antadze, Nino, "Who is the Other in the age of the Anthropocene? Introducing the Unknown Other in climate justice discourse," in *The Anthropocene Review*, 6:1–2 (2019), 38–54.
- Atterton, Peter, "Levinas and Our Moral Responsibility Toward Other Animals," in *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 54:6 (2011), 633–649.
- Awerkamp, Don, *Emmanuel Levinas: Ethics and Politics* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1977).
- Bauman, Zygmunt, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
- Betsan, Martin, "Taking Responsibility into all Matter: Engaging Levinas for the climate of the 21st century," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 48:4 (2016), 418–435, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1044927>>.
- Burggraeve, Roger, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace, and Human Rights*, trans. by Jeffrey Bloechl, (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 2002).
- Courtneil, Jane, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability: What's the Difference?," *Green Business Bureau*, (2022), <<https://greenbusinessbureau.com/business-function/executive/corporate-social-responsibility-and-sustainability-whats-the-difference/>>
- Davy, Barbara Jane, "An other face of ethics in Levinas," in *Ethics and the Environment*, 12:1 (2007), 39–66.
- Delaney, Tim, "Sustainability," in *Philosophy Now*, 88 (January/February 2012), <<https://philosophynow.org/issues/88/Sustainability>>.
- Derrida, Jacques, "Violence and Metaphysics," in Claire Elise Katz and Lara Trout (ed.), *Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1–88.
- Edelglass, William, James Hatley, and Christian Diehm (ed.), *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought* (USA: Duquesne University Press, 2012).



- Groves, C., "Sustainability and the future: Reflections on the ethical and political significance of sustainability," in *Sustainability Science*, 14 (2019), 915–924, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-019-00700-0>>.
- Herzog, Annabel, "Levinas on the Social: Guilt and the City," *Theory Culture and Society* (2014), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414523479>>.
- International Monetary Fund, "Sustainable Development Goals," *IMF Website* (n.d.), <<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/SDG>>.
- Kimura, Yuki, "UN Sustainable Development Report 2024," in *Global Society World News* (19 June 2024), <[https://www.globalsociety.earth/post/un-sustainable-development-report-2024?gad\\_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwpbi4BhByEiwAMC8JnfHRL-nPjNI5Y\\_tBTrFmtLKC-1bPGZJvGAXcku\\_zS16e4XukVaXK5RoCw6UQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.globalsociety.earth/post/un-sustainable-development-report-2024?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwpbi4BhByEiwAMC8JnfHRL-nPjNI5Y_tBTrFmtLKC-1bPGZJvGAXcku_zS16e4XukVaXK5RoCw6UQAvD_BwE)>.
- Krososky, Andrew, "What are the six factors of sustainability and how do we adhere to them?," *Greenmatters* (March 2021), <<https://www.greenmatters.com/p/six-factors-of-sustainability>>.
- Levinas, Emmanuel, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us," in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, (USA: The Athlone Press, 1990).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Is it Righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins, (California: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009).
- Levinas, Emmanuel, Alison Ainley, Peter Hughes and Tamra Wright, "The Paradox of Morality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas Rethinking the Other*, ed. by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood, (London: Routledge, 1988), 168-80.
- Moyer, Jonathan D. and Steve Hedden, "Are we on the right path to achieve the sustainable development goals?" in *World Development*, 127 (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104749>>.
- National Geographic, "Sustainable Development Goals," in *National Geographic Education Website* (n.d.), <<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/sustainable-development-goals/>>.
- Nelson, Eric S., "Levinas and Adorno: Can there be an Ethics of Nature?," in *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought* (USA: Duquesne University Press, 2012), 109–133.

- OECD, *The Short and Winding Road to 2030: Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2022), <<https://doi.org/10.1787/af4b630d-en>>.
- Perpich, Diane, "5 Scarce Resources? Levinas, Animals, and the Environment," in *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2008), 150–176, <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779784-008>>
- Sachs, Jeffrey D., Guillaume Lafortune and Grayson Fuller, *The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024* (Paris: Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2024), <<https://doi.org/10.25546/108572>>.
- Torelli, Riccardo, "Sustainability, responsibility and ethics: different concepts for a single path," in *Social Responsibility Journal*, 17:5 (2021), 719–739, <<https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-03-2020-0081>>.
- UNESCO, "Higher Education and the SDGs," UNESCO (2023), <<https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/the-contribution-of-higher-education-to-the-sdgs/>>.
- United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 Key Findings* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2024), <[https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SDGs\\_Report\\_Key\\_Findings\\_2024.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SDGs_Report_Key_Findings_2024.pdf)>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024* (2024), <<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Sustainable Development Goals," *United Nations SDG* (n.d.), <<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda-retired/#:~:text=On%201%20January%202016%2C%20the,Summit%20%E2%80%94%20officially%20came%20into%20force.>>>
- Van Roermund, Bert, "The Third Third: Levinas and 'We,'" in *Etica & Political/Ethics & Politics*, XXIII:1 (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2021), 203–220, <<http://hdl.handle.net/10077/32029>>.
- Wyschogrod, Edith, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974).

## Roland Theuas D.S. Pada, *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida's Thought*<sup>1</sup>

---

Franz Joseph C. Yoshiy, II

In his celebrated essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Jacques Derrida prefaces his discussion with a quotation from Montaigne: “we need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.”<sup>2</sup> The point, for Derrida, is that interpretations affirm the absence of an original presence or *center*. And that these interpretations become new *centers* worthy of future interpretation. What I attempt to do in this short piece is an “interpretation of interpretation.” Roland Theuas D.S. Pada’s book *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida’s Thought* affirms the absence of the origin and center, that is, Derrida. Pada’s work—which is an exercise of interpretation itself—therefore becomes the new center of interpretation. In this case, of *my* interpretation.

Pada’s *interpretation* of Derrida resulted in the overarching theme of his book: that *deconstruction* will have to depend upon the resources provided by *logocentrism* for its operation. Remember that Derrida’s entire project of *deconstruction* aims to unveil *logocentrism* and its various forms and iterations in philosophy, linguistics, social sciences, and literature. The *logocentric* will produce and operate within the logic of binary opposition. More than this, however, *logocentrism* seems to privilege one opposing term/concept over the other. Derrida saw and understood this logocentric *modus operandi* at work in various texts. Thus, Derrida set out to show, through the various gestures and strategies of *deconstruction*, that the stability provided by *logocentrism* is in fact unstable—that the structure of hierarchical opposition built by the logocentric will is *always already* doomed to fall under its own weight. Pada rehearses the deconstructive strategies against Derrida himself by showing the inevitability of logocentrism in Derrida’s thought. What Pada offers then is a *double reading* of Derrida: that while Derrida seems to hurl his criticisms against logocentrism, Derrida himself cannot escape the logic of the very

---

<sup>1</sup> UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023, 99pp.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Routledge, 1978), 351.

thing he is trying to criticize. This double reading is carefully laid out in four essays comprising the different chapters of the book. One may read each essay separately from the rest but woven together, they produce a compelling argument for the book's overall theme.

In Chapter One, Pada sets out to trace Derrida's deconstructive strategies in teasing out the logocentric tendencies within Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic structuralism and Martin Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics and ontology. He then proceeds to zero in on deconstruction as a form of textual intervention and ties it up with Derrida's icon(i)clastic<sup>3</sup> gestures such as *différance* and *sous rature* (writing under erasure). He concludes by arguing for a two-fold ontology at work in Derrida's thought—*immanence* and *transcendence*. Here, he forwards his claim that deconstruction necessarily relies upon logocentrism for its operation. That while deconstruction seems to be a critique of the system of signification, deconstruction still needs this system for it to function. To express his point clearer, he borrows an insight from phenomenology: "Taken as a *pure* idea, deconstruction can never exist without an intended object to *deconstruct*."<sup>4</sup> To fortify his conclusion in this essay, Pada examines the debate between Derrida and John Searle in Chapter Two. The debate between Derrida and Searle was precipitated by Derrida's deconstruction of J.L. Austin's "speech act theory"—in particular, Austin's notion of *parasitic* speech acts. Pada carefully follows the debate between the two and concludes that both Derrida and Searle harbors *logocentric* tendencies in their exchanges. Pada observes that both philosophers were *logocentric* "because [their] so-called debate or confrontation would not have been possible if the two authors had not focused their energies on Austin's text."<sup>5</sup> In this case, Austin's text was the inevitable *logocenter*—the object of Derrida's deconstruction. In these first two chapters of the book, Pada has convincingly established the necessity of *logocentrism* in Derrida's deconstruction.

From the necessity of *logocentrism*, Pada shifts his attention towards the ontological necessity of *normativity* in Chapter Three. In this chapter, he explores the sense of normativity in Derrida and Frankfurt School theorist, Axel Honneth. For Pada, there is an affinity between the two. On the one hand, Derrida recognizes the need for metaphysical violence for ethics to be possible. This violence comes in the form of reducing the *Other* to an "identity" in order to open "a space for dialogue."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand,

---

<sup>3</sup> A play on the words "iconic" and "iconoclastic." An apt reminder of how Derrida cemented the reputation of deconstruction as subverting the ideals of West while at the same time attracting more followers from the West.

<sup>4</sup> Pada, *The Context of Logocentrism*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 4, 71.

Honneth's recognition theory understands the necessity for individuals to struggle "through existing social practices" in order for the norm to be realized in the individual.<sup>7</sup> Pada concludes his discussion by noting the significant role played by *difference* (as emphasized by Derrida) in securing the possibility of Honneth's theory of recognition. The concluding chapter of the book—which seems to me like an encore—highlights the recurring motif of the book: the necessity of logocentrism in Derrida's deconstruction. Taking off from the previous chapter, Pada treats the notion of *difference* (together with consciousness and center) as key elements of repetition and how this magnifies the problem of logocentrism in Derrida's thought. Pada's core argument here is that insofar as repetition is concerned, deconstruction shows that repetition is always already inhabited by *ipseity* and *difference*. He uses a clear example to illustrate his point: "... one could say that I am writing in anticipation of my future disappearance, for in reading this once more, I have become an other of myself."<sup>8</sup> This is just another way of saying that when I write something and then *repeat* it back to my self (i.e., to my consciousness), the text (*center*) appears to my *consciousness* as something *different* as to when I wrote it. To borrow and recontextualize Heraclitus' dictum: one cannot read the same text similarly twice. For Pada, Derrida's *différance* perfectly illustrates this paradox of *ipseity* and *difference*.

One challenge that every reader must face is the difficulty of Derrida's text primarily because of the kind of language and writing style he employed. As Pada admits at the beginning of his book: "it would be difficult to recommend Derrida to novices and students new to philosophy."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it would be difficult if one does not have a good grasp of the context upon which Derrida wrote his works. This is perhaps the reason why some English translators of Derrida's books felt the *need* to write an introductory essay to their translations—to arm their readers with the necessary contextual considerations to navigate through Derrida's works. Two notable essays come to mind on this point: Gayatri Spivak's "Translator's Preface" to her English translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Barbara Johnson's introduction to her translation of Derrida's *Dissemination*.<sup>10</sup> Reading and trying to understand Derrida is one thing, writing about him is entirely another challenge.

Writing about Derrida, by itself, is already an act of faithfulness and betrayal. As Pada shows in Chapter Four, one cannot totally *repeat* something

---

<sup>7</sup> See *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), ix-lxxxvii and Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), vii-xix.

in the same way. The Derrida that we read in secondary works (or interpretations) are already mediated by the author's consciousness. The Derrida, therefore, that Pada presents in his book is *his* Derrida—a product of *his* mediation. And yet, his book would not have been possible if not for Derrida as the (logo)center of his attention. For the most part of the book, Pada assiduously read and cited Derrida's major works such as *Of Grammatology*, *Margins of Philosophy*, *Writing and Difference*, *Speech and Phenomena*, and *Dissemination*—works that one could consider as the “canon” of deconstruction. Relying on these texts, however, also meant that Pada had to rely on Derrida's language and strategies to demonstrate the inevitability of logocentrism in Derrida's thought. Pada was not oblivious to this fact. His entire work *performs* what he intended to prove, that is, deconstruction cannot escape logocentrism—just as his work cannot escape the *logocenter* that is Derrida. This, I believe, is what sets Pada apart from those who attempt to *write* an introduction to Derrida's thought: Pada introduces Derrida's deconstruction by *performance*. By demonstrating that Derrida's deconstruction is a critique of logocentrism but at the same time can only operate within the ambit of logocentrism, Pada tacitly shows its readers how deconstruction operates and produces an *aporetic* reading of a text. In other words, Pada does not simply try to repeat what Derrida already said, rather he tries to repeat Derrida's very gestures on Derrida himself. Still, Pada's book was modest in its claims—it does not brand itself as a “deconstructive” interpretation of Derrida. I surmise that this is his way of keeping his reading within the bounds of deconstruction's commitment to openness and what is yet to come (*l'avenir*).

One thing, however, that caught my attention is Pada's claim in Chapter One that “*Différance* traces its roots back to *Of Grammatology*.”<sup>11</sup> He backs up his statement by contextualizing it within Derrida's discourse on the primacy of speech over writing in *Of Grammatology*. Pada then proceeds to cite some passages from Derrida's famous 1968 lecture “*Différance*” to elucidate his point further. Derrida's bibliographers claim that the term *différance* was introduced in his essay “*Cogito and the History of Madness*” (which appears in *Writing and Difference*).<sup>12</sup> This information seems to suggest that *différance* traces its roots back to Derrida's essay “*Cogito and the History of Madness*,” not in *Of Grammatology* as Pada claims. If one reads Derrida's “*Cogito*,” one will readily notice that he mentions *différance* as a passing remark to describe the relationship of “absolute excess” in the “economy of

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> See William Schultz and Lewis Fried, *Jacques Derrida: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography* (London & New York: Garland Publishing, 1992) 12.

writing.”<sup>13</sup> In *Of Grammatology*, we find *différance* significantly peppered throughout the work particularly in Derrida’s discussion of nature, culture, and writing. In “Différance,” we find Derrida’s focused and sustained discussion of the layers of meaning behind *différance*, how it operates against the speech/writing opposition, and its relation to Freud’s *trace* and Heidegger’s *ontico-ontological* difference.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the fact that *différance* was introduced in the “Cogito,” Pada’s claim still holds if we follow the gradual introduction of *différance* in Derrida’s writings. One must note that in the “Cogito,” Derrida introduced the term within the context of his critique of Michel Foucault’s *History of Madness*. In *Of Grammatology*, however, we find a clearer articulation of how Derrida operationalizes *différance* in his critique of the logocentrism perpetrated by the speech/writing opposition. The *différance* in *Of Grammatology* is further amplified by his lecture “Différance” where he tries to dissect the layers of forces behind this linguistic anomaly. In other words, if we follow the context of Derrida’s writings, the *différance* of the 1968 lecture traces its roots back to *Of Grammatology*. We can, therefore, construe Pada’s claim in this way. Nonetheless, Pada’s work could have benefited from exploring on how Derrida appropriated *différance* in his other works, like “Cogito.”

Overall, Pada’s book is a remarkable addition to the growing catena of literature on Derrida scholarship. Pada was able to maintain academic rigor while being clear and concise in his language. One may also find his verbal illustrations entertaining (and sometimes humorous). In four essays, Pada was able to deliver what his book promised to its readers: that *logocentrism* is inevitable in any discourse (deconstruction included). Doing so, however, entailed employing the very gesture of deconstruction against itself. Pada, then, delivered more than what he promised: his book poignantly showed how deconstruction can neutralize the opposition between *theory* and *practice*. The practice of deconstruction against deconstruction, turning Derrida against Derrida, reveals their logocentric proclivities. Indeed, “a specter is haunting Derrida—the specter of *logocentrism*.”<sup>15</sup>

*Department of History and Philosophy  
College of Social Sciences  
University of the Philippines Baguio  
The Philippines*

---

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1982), 1-27.

<sup>15</sup> A playful reappropriation of Marx’s opening words in *The Communist Manifesto*.

## References

- Derrida, Jacques, *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson, (London: Athlone Press, 1981).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, (Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1982).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 1978).
- Pada, Roland Theuas, *The Context of Logocentrism in Derrida's Thought*, (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).
- Schultz, William and Fried, Lewis, *Jacques Derrida: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography*, (London & New York: Garland Publishing, 1992).



## Jacques Rancière, *Uncertain Times*<sup>1</sup>

---

**Bryan Patrick B. Garcia**

In the Preface of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes: “each individual is any case a child of his time; thus philosophy, too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts.”<sup>2</sup> At any rate, what are we to think of today’s times and how can we—as its children (and practitioners of philosophy)—comprehend it? Furthermore, once grasped by thought, what are we to do? These are some of the questions one might consider when engaging with Jacques Rancière’s newest book *Uncertain Times*. In this text, he provides (un)timely interventions spread across fifteen essays and speeches written between 2010 to 2022. Throughout, Rancière gives his analyses on various matters ranging from racism, populism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and politics. Far from being simply opinion pieces on the political state of the world, Rancière’s book is enriched with its use of the conceptual tools found in his oeuvre. With the book’s structure and its commentary on contemporary events through the lens of Rancièrian concepts, one could claim that it is an accessible text for those who wish to acquaint themselves with its author’s works.

The book’s discussions are divided into two parts. The first part titled “The Violence of Consensus” dwells on the current state of affairs. The title of the text comes into full force when Rancière reframes questions on racism, populism, and the pandemic, particularly in the context of Western liberal governments. Here, Rancière challenges our presuppositions on who the perpetrators of racism are, what populism actually is, and how medical action during the pandemic was decided. So-called “liberal” governments which present themselves to be against the conservative right are no different from them, as these governments also institutionalize racist and anti-immigrant policies (e.g., The Islamic veil law and the expulsion of Roma people). These policies are enacted and justified by liberals in order to supposedly curb

---

<sup>1</sup> trans. by Andrew Brown (New Jersey: Polity Press, 2024), 166pp.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

disorder among minority groups that become the fuel of far-right rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> These discriminatory laws are introduced under the pretext of equality, asserting that everyone must conform to their supposed universality. Yet, paradoxically, those who do not conform to these universals are unequal and are not deemed worthy to be considered part of society.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Rancière further brings the reader to the realm of uncertainty by reassessing what the term “populism” actually entails. In recent years, figures such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Duterte have been regarded as populists and threats to democracy. Populism, according to its classic definition, is:

a style of interlocution that addresses the people directly, independently of their representatives and notables; the affirmation that governments and ruling elites care about their own interests more than public affairs; and an identity-based rhetoric that expresses a fear and rejection of foreigners.<sup>5</sup>

For Rancière, however, populism is “elusive.” The reduction of populism to its supposedly three essential characteristics is problematic insofar as the three features are not inherently linked to one another. For one, “the people” is not pre-given, but is constructed; “What exists,” Rancière maintains “are diverse, even antagonistic figures of the people, figures constructed by highlighting certain modes of assembly, certain distinctive traits, certain capacities or incapacities.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, populists and “the people” it supposedly finds its power in are simply one of many peoples. On the other hand, Rancière also argues that populist figures will never affirm the idea of governments and ruling elites only caring for their interests.<sup>7</sup> To bring Rancière’s ideas closer to home, was not Duterte’s brand of leadership marked by the motto “*Tapang at malasakit*” (courage and care)? Such a motto does not allude to self-interest, but rather an interest for the welfare of the masses. The third essential feature of populism, racism, bears an important part in the construction of the people of populism. The critics of populism accuse the people of being inherently irrational, always tending toward xenophobia and racism.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as discussed by Rancière, the actual source of racism is not found within the people, but rather in liberal governments. The decoupling of the essential features listed is a decisive move that affects our

---

<sup>3</sup> Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 4.

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

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

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

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

very understanding of democracy and populism. Political commentators, especially from the Center and Left, criticize populism in the name of defending democracy. Paradoxically, this critique of populism produces an anti-democratic effect. The idea of an “ignorant mass” prone to being hoodwinked by charismatic authoritarians justifies for the need for a “rational leader” to whom the ignorant masses must submit.<sup>9</sup>

The striking contentions of Rancière would find further lucidity in his analysis of how governments responded to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The anti-democratic effect of the pandemic was the obedience to science and the State. The irrational many must be dependent on the rational few whose responses and policies are based on science.<sup>10</sup> However, we must qualify Rancière’s statements on science. Rancière’s critique might appear similar to anti-lockdown protesters back in 2020 claiming the virus was a hoax, but what Rancière wants us to cast our doubt upon is not medical science per se, but rather economic science as the basis for the pandemic response.<sup>11</sup> I see that Rancière’s apprehensiveness with what regards itself to be “scientific” is an apprehensiveness toward those institutions that claim scientific authority in determining and regulating the actions of people, and not as an apprehensiveness with scientific disciplines. The monopolization of knowledge, if we may recall from Rancière’s earlier work, leads to stultification<sup>12</sup> by rendering individuals incapable, therefore having no right in participating in the construction of the common world. This was precisely one of the reasons why Rancière has distanced himself from Louis Althusser since the events of May 1968. It was Althusser’s Leninist approach which became anti-democratic, believing that spontaneous action was “unscientific” and ideological. One’s position relative to knowledge becomes the basis of inequality and an obstacle to democracy. Whether it is in the context of the pandemic or of political action, the problem Rancière sees is science qualifying itself to be the sole arbiter of a set of practices warranted by its adherence to “objectivity.” This is how he defines “consensus,” as a certain way of affirming the objectivity of reality necessitating a certain course of action with no alternative. Moreover, consensus is a source for the anti-democratic policies of a state; it is because we have no other recourse to solve racism, populism, and the pandemic that we must put all our trust in one institution and blindly follow its orders because reality cannot be otherwise and it forces us into this moment.

---

<sup>9</sup> See *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> See *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1–18.

From inequality and consensus, the second part, titled “Moments of Democracy” moves toward how we may imagine and constitute a democratic reality. Fittingly, the second part begins with the notion of “event.” In contrast to consensus and the status quo, an event “appears as the unexpected occurrence that upsets the order of expectations.”<sup>13</sup> Similar to Alain Badiou’s,<sup>14</sup> Rancière’s idea of an event is that which allows novelty and separation from the current state of affairs. It is therefore an event, like that of May 1968, which allows us to find something new and different from the present. May 1968 defies the “sociological mode of interpretation.” We have to note how Rancière uses the word “sociology.” Sociology in this context is not simply a discipline, but rather, a way of defining society within a certain set of quasi-natural laws allowing it to remain cohesive.<sup>15</sup> May 1968 was an event since 1) it disrupted the normal flow of things marked by the occupations of universities and factories and 2) it did not follow the interpretation of Marxism, highlighting an objective evolution of society with its final phase being led by the working class and its Party; instead, at the forefront of the struggle were students and non-PCF aligned groups. These were exactly “moments of democracy” for they questioned hierarchies on who is supposed to lead society and make revolutions happen.<sup>16</sup>

Events (in the Rancièrian sense) are a source of politics (also in a Rancièrian sense). Politics, as defined by Rancière elsewhere and in the book is characterized by a “displacement of social identities” wherein social actors disidentify themselves from conformity to the present distribution of the sensible.<sup>17</sup> Disidentification allows political subjects to emerge. Rancière’s take on political subjectivity is unique because while he agrees with his contemporaries that a subject does not exist as a given, he also insists that a subject bases itself in activity rather than passivity. The Rancièrian notions of politics and subjectivity are more relevant in today’s context, especially in how political commentators from all across the spectrum understand activity and freedom. Although the majority thinks of democracy as having the

---

<sup>13</sup> Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Badiou defines his own notion of event as a “rupture” with the present. He writes: “A truth is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order. I have named this type of rupture which opens up truths ‘the event’.” See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), xii.

<sup>15</sup> Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> Rancière further elaborates the PCF position as seen in Althusser’s 1964 article “Student Problems.” The latter criticized students of the Sorbonne who were asserting that they should also have a place in the administration of the university. Althusser maintained that students are not on equal footing with their professors and that such mentality is an anathema to science. See Louis Althusser, “Student Problems,” in *Radical Philosophy*, 170, (Nov/Dec 2011): 11–15 and Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> See Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 78–79.

freedom to choose, the valid Rancièrian response to this is in a form of a question: do the choices that we make challenge the hierarchies we encounter and reorganize the distribution of the sensible?<sup>18</sup> This critical question adds another layer to our conceptual understanding of democratic politics, different from liberal and traditional Marxist models. The underpinnings of societal change in Rancière's politics are its use of space and time in constructing social reality. What makes politics possible is how political actors intervene through occupation of space and creating a temporality of their own, different from that of the existing order. The unique use of space and reclaiming of time have become hallmarks of important anti-capitalist struggles in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in the form of May 1968 and the Occupy movement of the 2000s and 2010s. The primary relevance of these movements was its method of protest which was occupation rather than a march. In both cases of May 1968 and the Occupy movement, they were successfully able to reconfigure the use of space and therefore also alter the "mode of visibility of the common."<sup>19</sup> The occupation of space allowed for a disruption of the normal flow of life. The Philippines has had this kind of moment, too. The case of the 1971 Diliman Commune is another clear example of how a space was used in a different manner from what it was originally assigned. From a site of knowledge production as a university campus, the University of the Philippines became a bastion of resistance against the Marcos regime, albeit for a short span of time. A common thread among the three is their ephemerality. None of them lasted longer than three months. As Rancière points out, an event's ephemerality is always seen as a weakness, particularly from an orthodox Marxist standpoint which favors "long-term" strategies. However, far from being a weakness, a movement's ephemerality is its strength for it is through this transience that ruptures within the normal flow of time are created.<sup>20</sup> This move of "politicizing" time is present not just in this book, but in many others written by Rancière. His use of temporality in politics is essential in understanding his emancipatory project as it further brings our imaginaries to new terrains. A tendency in sociopolitical philosophy is to ignore how one's actions and social identity are determined by time. Thus, it prevents us from questioning the status of our freedom in the present time. Are we only capable of changing our reality in times of elections? If this is so, then we must reexamine our definitions of democracy, since we are constrained by time. Perhaps this is one of Rancière's most valuable lessons to liberal democratic states constantly threatened by the far-right. There is a danger in waiting. The idealization of

---

<sup>18</sup> See Rancière, *Uncertain Times*, 132.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–92.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 80–81.

electoral politics as the only avenue for change constrains us to the status quo and its own time. Obviously, this has had its major consequences here and abroad. The constraints of time and electoral politics disallows people to completely challenge political threats such as fascism. Should we desire to challenge the political status quo, we must seek routes other than elections, and Rancière's discussion on the relevance of temporality offers us a critical perspective. To think of change, one must not simply wait for the "right time" as the right time we may be anticipating is the time of those in power.

I chose to highlight temporality last for the reason that it is a theme which undergirds the entirety of the book. For most scholars, it is common practice to arrange a book or a compilation of essays chronologically. The peculiar arrangement found in this book, however, shows an organization that lacks temporal structure and hierarchy. This is perhaps where the uniqueness of the book is found as it in itself practices the democracy Rancière professes. A chronological sequencing of chapters in this book based on publication date may entail that an older essay can no longer keep up with a more current one in terms of social commentary, but as the text shows, even essays describing the events of the 1960s can still exercise political force not merely through memory. The methods of equality exercised in the Sorbonne during the merry months of May are not dead relics from a past nor images of nostalgia for the disgruntled leftist, but an active component of more recent protest movements such as Occupy. Furthermore, such method of sequencing presents an active opposition to a type of thinking that presents the past as a dead, accomplished set of facts. As Walter Benjamin argues, "nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history."<sup>21</sup> It is this living past and its effective presence in the present that also contribute to the uncertainty of our times, apart from the fact that the lines which we thought were clear-cut are in fact actually blurred. This imparts an important reminder to us: nothing is certain and nothing is set in stone. Rancière makes readers find more questions just as much as they think they could locate answers. On one hand, Rancière does provide timely insights; on the other, they are untimely as they open up to us new ways to imagine life, different from our times. This is why I described Rancière's reflections as "(un)timely." My enclosure of the prefix "un-" within parentheses represents my own *uncertainty* in giving a description of the author's interventions.

*The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

---

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 254.

## References

- Althusser, Louis, "Student Problems," in *Radical Philosophy*, 170, (Nov/Dec 2011), 11–15.
- Badiou, Alain, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005).
- Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. by Allen W. Wood, trans. by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Rancière, Jacques, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. by Kristin Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Uncertain Times*, trans. by Andrew Brown (New Jersey: Polity Press, 2024).

## Michel Serres, *Religion: Rereading What Is Bound Together*<sup>1</sup>

Jessie Joshua Z. Lino

In an attempt to provide completion for Le Grand Récit, Michel Serres finally took religion as an explicit theme in his book *Religion: Rereading What Is Bound Together*. While the theme of religion was implicitly touched in his *Angels: A Modern Myth* and the *Foundations* trilogy,<sup>2</sup> Serres was yet to flesh out its fecund theoretical importance in developing further the narrative of the Earth and of humanity, specifically of how we come to exist in composition—of how we are bound together (e.g., tied together), oscillating between the context of the Roman Catholic tradition and of secular modernity. The book, however, is neither a theological treatise nor an apologia of religion, and Serres' comprehensive approach invokes some important insights from his theoretical enterprise as a philosopher of science: the dissipation of energy and dissemination of information, the anthropological dimension of sacrifice and violence, the critical-theoretical discourse of science, and the problem of evil—the last being titular for the work's concluding chapter.

Serres begins *Religion* with the conceptual assumption about the nature of religion and how its etymology articulates religion's contemporaneity, addressing why and how crucial it is in today's time.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022), 200pp.

<sup>2</sup> See Michel Serres, *Angels: A Modern Myth*, trans. by Francis Cowper (Paris & New York: Flammarion, 1995); Michel Serres, *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Michel Serres, *Statues: The Second Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); and Michel Serres, *Geometry: The Third Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> The term *religion* could be radically derived from *relegare* ('to re-read'), *religare* ('to bind'), and *religiens* ('to take care') altogether. While the first root simply pertains to the ritualistic act of both celebrating and memorizing (e.g., honoring into a memory), and the third to the transformed orientation of religions from belief to concern (e.g., to orient ourselves in the secular age of the mundane by 'taking care'), Serres in this book is fundamentally concerned with the



Religion is capable of binding humans into communities, and Serres cites the biblical reference of Jesus reprimanding the whole community and the universality of the one “without sin” to cast the first stone at the woman accused of committing adultery.<sup>4</sup> This tribunal, a sacrifice of an individual sinner or a pardoned victim, Serres claims, “may be said to have *bound together* the murderers,”<sup>5</sup> and thus introducing violence—the original sin, if not the problem of evil—as a point of departure in the story of how societies come to exist and how violence is present at the heart of any social groups.<sup>6</sup> Instead of providing arguments in justifying his claim, Serres turns to history, myth and science to expand this seemingly underappreciated view of our social origin. To accomplish this, he introduces the notion of “hot spots,” serving as an analogical *dispositif* to refer to cites of convergences, i.e., places where “another world manifests itself in ours, those concrete contact with another reality, be it virtual, intelligent, spiritual, inspirational—perhaps dangerous as well.”<sup>7</sup> In bringing together both real and virtual, the sins of today (enabled by our scientific progress) is tied together with its historical/mythological past, as Serres argues, “We have long believed that the fires of science produce less violence than those of religion. We were mistaken.”<sup>8</sup> Today, we are witnessing the violence as a ‘crisis of reason,’ the collapse of which signaled by

the flash of lightning at Hiroshima, and then at Nagasaki, where a science reputed to be wholly and uniquely good committed crimes against humanity, massacred innocents, in a tragically incendiary spot. Today, we are the survivors of this crisis and of this burning, where the energy expended was proportionate to the crime.<sup>9</sup>

The supposedly light of reason, which Serres originally locates in the quest of the Magi (three wise men) whose guidance they sought from the star of the Epiphany,<sup>10</sup> and which we thought to guarantee truly progressive

---

second root for its thematic importance in articulating what religion exactly does: binding something together.

<sup>4</sup> “Preface,” *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 81. Serres explicitly provides a similar claim: “the guilty is society. In the face of physically contestable facts, there can be no doubt that violence is an ineradicably constant feature of human existence.” See *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–21.

ideals during the Enlightenment period, has shined the brightest at a time of pure violence—a violence that fundamentally questioned our humanity *bound* as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, we find the same thoughtlessness, the same mark of our rational laziness, and the same murderous violent impulse in the biblical story of the casting of stones, wherein only when bound as a group or belonging to a collective (e.g., an angry mob perhaps) do we gain an authority to hold tribunals, and judge an individual's innocence “in the name of society.”<sup>12</sup> Such is the same with another important biblical reference Serres re-interprets as a hot spot: Peter's denial of Jesus. While Jesus was on trial in the court of the Sanhedrin, Peter experiences his own tribunal just outside the court. The servants who questioned Peter's association with Jesus is revelatory of the nature and the origins of how courts of justice were constituted in the first place.<sup>13</sup> What we consider justice in primitive societies is nothing but the grand spectacle of a society ready to search for any guilt. Laws too can be violent, only that they are veiled by the presumed innocence of society, whose judgments through its courts are cast like stones. While we can agree that Peter himself sinned, Serres further asks readers to re-think the human experience of an individual within a trial held by a murderous group. From here, two points may be considered.

First, Serres explicitly states that society, what is bound together, and not the individual, always bears the responsibility for evil.<sup>14</sup> Serres resorts to theodicy in explaining this fact: When Voltaire (satirizing Leibniz) summoned God the Father, the creator, to appear before a tribunal that called into question the responsibility for evil, as His creation primordially causing the world's worst environmental tragedies, the tribunal has found Him guilty. However, earthquakes are blind facts definitive to the natural order of the world, take for example the Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco bay and the one that happened in Haiti, the former achieving 7.2 in the Richter scale while the latter 7.0.<sup>15</sup> Nature, perhaps even God, would say that that the .2 difference in the Richter scale may be insignificant. But perhaps the political life of both San Francisco and Haiti, the former being a rich city and the latter being a poor island, might have effectuated their two hundred-thousand-person difference in casualty, Haiti being at the worse end—a very great difference indeed. It is not nature, nor God the creator who is to bear

---

<sup>11</sup> Serres poses the question: “How can we be unaware of this original sin, this murderous impulse, written down, in all its darkness, in our souls and continually in our history?” *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–86.

responsibility for this, but society and its ability to be well-adapted to calamities through its progressive sciences.<sup>16</sup>

The second point is related with the first, where Serres might unknowingly express a sincerity in the anthropological kind: While there might not be a general solution to the problem of evil and of violence, the binding force of religion can definitely bring together individuals who separate themselves and wash their hands, attempting to see themselves as innocent (therefore, morally pure and better than others). If we are to bear responsibility for evil and the violence of the world, the people must come to see themselves as a whole. Serres then would utilize a somewhat Heideggerian take on Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>17</sup> The "they," which is Heidegger's *Das Man*, the thoughtless entities, designates for Serres

any undifferentiated groups, any mass of individuals having no identity separate from membership in the group, that condemns an innocent person to death—in a word, society. Society does not know what it does. It is violent without knowing it. Or, if it does know this, it hides the fact from itself.<sup>18</sup>

Society, bound together, blameworthy as a whole, is itself a lacking justification for the monotonous repetition of humanity's violent crimes: war, murder, exploitation, cruelty, humiliation, etc.<sup>19</sup> Even Serres could only imagine the possibility of salvation through an omnipotent God, whose infinite mercy could forgive us in spite of *us*. Who is this "they/them" in Jesus' words, who He asks God to forgive? Serres answers, "They are members of the human race. Christ died in order to wash away the sins of the world—the sins of all people. Of humanity."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, what Serres here aims to share to his readers as a lasting insight is that, in the face of a violent crime or an evil committed by an individual, no human being should presume to be better than the rest. Only then can we ultimately accept the fact that all historical acts of violence, which we originally described as *inhuman*, are in fact truly *human*. Jesus could only bear all our sins for *us* if the sins are ours to bear at first.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> Luke 23:34. This is parenthetically quoted in *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Serres, *Religion*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* Of course, forgiveness is possible for individuals as Jesus Himself never condemned an individual, and Serres identifies the woman accused of adultery and the penitent thief at His side on the cross as examples of this religious pardon. See *Ibid.*, 87–88.

While there is more to say about the binding force of religion at work within our current different mundane ceremonies like funeral and marriage,<sup>21</sup> Serres' most interesting claims in *Religion* about religion's relation to violence and to the narrative of the human are his explicit contributions to Le Grand Récit—literally The Great Story of humanity. Internal to his philosophical enterprise, *Religion* provides a comprehensive panorama of the nature of violence vis-à-vis the dynamics of social cohesion we develop as groups of these religious violence. One could simply recall that prior Christianity, the earlier non-Christian religions performed sacrifices that are important to their communal bond. Serres only shows to us how, at some point in our Christian history, violence came revelatory of our nature as human societies. Another important contribution perhaps is how Serres's idea of a hot spot paints the picture of religion's binding force vertically (as when religion binds together the real and the abstract, the immanent and the transcendent, God and human, etc.) and horizontally (as when religion binds together individual and society, the human and the Earth, the present from its past, etc.). Only by recognizing what religion truly means can we redeem ourselves as a community, realizing how and why we are bound to each other even beyond the violence we ought to overcome.

Of course, one cannot read the text without noticing Serres' treatment of Roman Catholicism in her singular totality,<sup>22</sup> but somehow sweepingly *binds* different Christian churches and traditions altogether, and continues to refer to them as Christianity.<sup>23</sup> And Serres will never address this limitation anymore.<sup>24</sup> In this final work, specifically the final paragraph of the book, Serres could only offer us with a prayer: "God, deliver *us* from evil."<sup>25</sup>

*Department of Philosophy  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas, The Philippines*

## References

Serres, Michel, *Angels: A Modern Myth*, trans. by Francis Cowper (Paris & New York: Flammarion, 1995).

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 99–102. See also *Ibid.*, 137–139.

<sup>22</sup> Serres reminisces in his youthful years the Roman Catholic tradition as a "descendant of the Cathar tradition." *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> See *Ibid.*, 32, 44, and 107.

<sup>24</sup> Serres died the day after finishing the manuscript of *Religion* and therefore will not have the opportunity of proofing the whole manuscript further. See translator's note, *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 191. Emphasis original.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Geometry: The Third Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Religion: Rereading What Is Bound Together*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Statues: The Second Book of Foundations*, trans. by Randolph Burks (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

# Submissions

---

## Please Read Carefully

### A. What do we publish?

We are interested in publishing articles, review articles, and book reviews across the whole range of philosophical topics, but with special emphasis on the following subject strands:

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

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

We are not accepting creative works at the moment.

### B. How long should a submission be?

- Article (8,000 words or less)
- Review Article (8,000 words or less)
- Book Review (2,500 words or less)

### C. When should you submit and what happens to your submission??

We now accept submissions all year round. All unsolicited submissions undergo the following review process:

- Initial vetting process of the Editorial Board. In this stage, the Editorial Board screens based on their suitability for further review. All authors are informed about the result of this initial process. Please take note that a notice to proceed is not yet an offer to publish, it is merely to inform the author that his/her submission has passed the initial stage and will further undergo the blind peer-review process. It is also in this stage when the author is informed whether his/her submission is considered for the June or December issue.
- Blind peer-review process. When an author receives a notice to proceed, his/her submission will be sent to a nominated expert for blind review. In general, this process could take between two to six months, depending on various circumstances. Since this part of the review could be tedious, we solicit the patience of the author.
- Notice of acceptance, rejection, or provisional acceptance. Based on the referee's report, the author will be informed whether the Editorial Board has decided to accept or reject the submission for publication. In majority of cases, a provisional acceptance is given to an author who needs to revise his/her submission based on the recommendations of the referee and the Editorial Board. Full acceptance is only given when the recommended revisions are addressed.
- Notice to publish. A notice to publish will require the full cooperation of the author, as this stage involves editing the style, grammar, format, and overall layout of the accepted submission. Please take note that the Editorial Board reserves the right to exclude accepted submissions that do not comply with the stylistic standards of the journal.
- Release of the issue.

Because of the sheer number of unsolicited submissions that we receive on a daily basis, submission management has become a challenge for us. This often results in the piling-up of submissions, the breakdown of the online submission tool, and, at times, unacknowledged submissions. In this regard, we wish to solicit for the patience and full cooperation of contributors.

## Specific Submission Guidelines

1. We accept submissions in either English or Filipino with good punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Provide a 200-word abstract in English and at least 4 key words. Please take note of the number of the acceptable word count for your submission (see Section B above).
2. Kritike is a refereed journal and follows a double-blind review policy, which means that the identities of both the author and the referee are concealed during the review process. As such, please make sure that your manuscript is prepared for blind review, meaning your name and institutional affiliation should not appear in the body of your manuscript. If you cited your own previous work(s) in the article, delete your name from the citation(s).
3. We recommend that, at the first instance, you use our prescribed citation style: Click here to visit the journal's style guide page (<https://www.kritike.org/kritike-style-guide.html>).

4. Submit your text in 2.0 line spacing with 12 points font size. Quotations exceeding four lines should be indented and single-spaced.

5. Save your paper as either a Rich Text Format file (\*.rtf) or a Microsoft Word document (\*.doc or \*.docx).

6. Submit your paper as an email attachment to [\*\*submissions.kritike@gmail.com\*\*](mailto:submissions.kritike@gmail.com) with the following required information and additional attachment:

- Complete name: Surname, first name, and middle initial
- Institutional affiliation (e.g., Department of Philosophy, University of Santo Tomas, Philippines)
- Official email address (preferably your institutional email address)
- Title of your submission
- 200-word abstract in English with at least 4 keywords
- Attach your updated curriculum vitae

7. By sending us your submission, you agree to be bound to the Terms and Conditions stated in the journal's Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement (<https://www.kritike.org/copyright-and-ethics.html>).

**NB: We will only honor unsolicited submissions with complete information and attachments. Thank you.**

# Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement

---

KRITIKE is committed to meet the highest ethical standards in research and academic publication. The journal is guided by the following principles:

## A. Responsibilities of the Editorial Board

The Editorial Board ensures that manuscripts are prepared for blind peer-review. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to accept, reject, or recommend a manuscript for revision and resubmission. Such decision is based, to a large extent, on the recommendations of nominated experts who act as referees. It is the responsibility of the Editorial Board to inform an author about the status of his/her submission, regardless of the decision. The Editorial Board may choose to reject a paper that violates legal provisions on libel, copyrights, and originality (plagiarism). Information regarding a manuscript under review must remain confidential until it is finally accepted for publication. The Editorial Board does not necessarily endorse the views expressed in the articles published in the journal. **As an Open Access journal in the Gold category, KRITIKE does not charge any fees to complete the publication process. No charges are levied against the authors or users for submission or article processing.**

## B. Responsibilities of the Referee

The referees nominated by KRITIKE's Editorial Board are experts in their areas of specialization. The referees assist the Editorial Board's decision to accept, reject, or revise and resubmit manuscripts based on their objective assessments and recommendations. A referee must treat an assigned manuscript with utmost confidentiality during the peer review process; however, it is the responsibility of the referee to inform the Editorial Board when a legal violation by the author is suspected. The evaluation of a manuscript should be based solely on its academic merit and not on race, gender, sexuality, or religious and/or political orientation of the author.

## C. Responsibilities of the Author

It is the responsibility of the author to prepare his/her manuscript for blind review. The author must ensure that his/her work is original and not plagiarized. The sources used in the manuscript should be properly cited. An author must not submit the same manuscript to another journal when it is currently under review by KRITIKE. It is the responsibility of an author to inform the Editorial Board right away if his/her manuscript is being considered in another journal or publication medium; in such case, KRITIKE will discontinue the review of the manuscript. If an author's manuscript is published by KRITIKE, he/she must adhere to the provisions set in the **Copyrights** section of the journal



## Contact Us

---

If you wish to send us your feedback, general questions about the journal, questions about article submissions, theme suggestions for future issues, or word of intention to be a peer-reviewer or referee, send a message to [kritike.editor@gmail.com](mailto:kritike.editor@gmail.com).

If you wish to be a peer-reviewer or referee, do send us your complete name, e-mail address, institutional affiliation, position, and area of expertise via e-mail (include subject heading: reviewer). If you have any suggestions for specific themes (e.g., “European Philosophy and the Filipino Mind” or “Is there such thing as Filipino Philosophy?”) for future issues of the journal, send them via (include subject heading: theme).

Please note that unsolicited submissions should be sent following the journal’s submission guidelines (<https://www.kritike.org/submissions.html>).

You can also contact us via snail mail:

KRITIKE  
c/o **Dr. Paolo A. Bolaños**  
Department of Philosophy  
Room 109 Main Building  
University of Santo Tomas  
España, Manila 1015  
Philippines